SUMMARY OF LESSONS FROM FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES PROGRAM

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This study summarises the lessons from nineteen formative evaluations of the Strategic Initiatives (SI) program. Strategic Initiatives, a federal-provincial cost-shared program, was announced by the Government of Canada in the February 1994 budget for innovative pilot projects to be developed in conjunction with provinces and territories and Aboriginal peoples. This five-year program was established within the Department of Human Resources Development to provide the mechanism through which the pilots would be implemented. The pilots were to test new and alternative approaches in employment, training, learning, education, income support and services, and to assist in the move to a more efficient and cost-effective social security system.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY i

1.0 INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Notes on the Methodology 2
1.2 Framework for the Summary of Lessons from Strategic Initiative Formative Evaluations 3
1.3 Coverage of Policy Areas 4

2.0 ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT AND DEPENDENCE ON INCOME SUPPORT 7

2.1 Job Creation 7
2.2 Addressing Barriers to Employment 10
2.3 Conclusions 22

3.0 IMPROVED PROGRAM SUPPORTS 25

3.1 Improved Labour Market Information 25
3.2 Improved Career Services 27
3.3 Improved Access to Child Care 30
3.4 Non-Employment Support for Specific Target Groups 31
3.5 Conclusions 32

4.0 PARTNERSHIPS 33

4.1 Range of Partnerships 33
4.2 Types of Partnerships 37
4.3 Impact and Challenges of Partnerships 41
4.4 Conclusion 44

5.0 IMPROVED PROGRAM MECHANISMS 45

5.1 Innovative Approaches 45
5.2 Initiating New Programs 53
5.3 Conclusions 57

APPENDIX A: EVALUATIONS REVIEWED 59

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LESSONS FROM STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS

The Strategic Initiatives (SI) program was set up in March 1994 to promote the development of innovative social programming to address the changing needs of Canadians. The emphasis was placed on testing new approaches to help Canadians develop skills, get work and participate more fully in society. This document reflects the lessons learned through the formative evaluations of nineteen projects funded under the Strategic Initiatives program. The lessons are grouped according to the type of project and the process of project implementation:

- projects to address barriers to employment and long term dependence on income support;
- projects to provide improved program supports;
- activities related to partnerships; and
- improved program design and delivery mechanisms.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT AND DEPENDENCE ON INCOME SUPPORT

Many projects addressed barriers to employment and long term dependence on income support. These projects contributed directly to increasing employment opportunities, reducing reliance on government assistance and addressing barriers to long term attachment to the labour force.

Some projects provided general wage subsidies to employers to promote hiring of individuals facing barriers to accessing employment opportunities. The evaluations suggested that:

- general wage subsidies are more appropriate to support job creation in economies with significant potential for economic expansion than in other contexts and are particularly effective when tied to local economic development plans;
- linking the allocation of wage subsidies in the non-profit sector to local economic development plans helps to reduce the risk of funding "make work" projects;

- general wage subsidies offer limited benefits for job creation if not properly designed and targeted. Targeting reduces the risk that jobs would have been created even without program support (dead-weight loss) and increases the chances that these job opportunities go to those who are the focus of the program.

Other projects provided targeted wage subsidies and offered the following lessons:

- targeted wage subsidies are most effective when they focus on providing opportunities for employing those who have perceived (but not actual) employment disadvantages;

- conversely, targeted wage subsidies in isolation are not typically effective with truly unproductive individuals since their employment will end with the subsidy;

- the investment of wage subsidies for encouraging youth employment is successful because it encourages employers to take seriously the possibility of employing youth and helps them overcome their perceived disadvantages in the work force;

- targeted wage subsides are ideal for addressing the employment barriers faced by recent graduates in areas where the school to work transition is hard. They allow employers to offset the investment costs occasioned because of the graduates" higher salary costs and lack of experience.

Many Strategic Initiatives focussed on the employment-related needs of students and/or recent graduates and linked programs to continuing education. It was noted that:

- prolonged unemployment — particularly for those with limited barriers to employment — may have serious negative consequences on the risk of future income dependency;

- a relatively small investment by government can reduce the risk of future dependency of post-secondary graduates;

- tying wage subsides for students to the financing of their continuing education increases the likelihood that the participant will continue to attend a post-secondary education institution. The value of this education in avoiding future dependency is unknown;

- the commitment of employers to being partners in education and providing meaningful work-related experiences is critical to the success of targeted wage subsidies for students;

- providing income to participants in employment programs at above market-rate levels may have a negative impact on other workers. Providing alternate compensation forms (such as tuition vouchers) may reduce these negative reactions;

- realistic work experiences are more likely to be available to students if employers understand clearly the educational objectives of the targeted wage subsidies. A realistic work experience exposes the student to a structured employer/employee relationship which involves, among other things, job interviews, work planning and performance evaluations;

- self-employment programs which provide subsidies to individuals who would not otherwise be receiving government support — such as recent graduates — may not be cost-effective.

Some projects for individuals facing multiple barriers to labour force attachment provided single-faceted interventions and others provided multi-faceted interventions. Lessons suggest that:

- single-faceted interventions may not be particularly effective for those facing multiple barriers to employment;

- a multi-faceted approach is required to address the negative aspects of dependence on social assistance. Employment-related programs cannot overcome the negative incentives to work which are built into the social assistance system;

- clients with multiple barriers to labour market attachment need more monitoring, better planning and longer periods of support. They may require a sequence of training projects and work experiences;

- programs for clients with multiple barriers need to be individualised to allow them to take advantage of a range of services. Training and work experience projects cannot be seen as one-time interventions;

- programs for those with multiple barriers to labour market attachment need to address the barriers which prevent client participation in employment programs by providing support services.

Improved Program Supports

Some Strategic Initiatives contributed indirectly to improving employment opportunities. They addressed specific barriers to employment-related programming and employment by providing improved access to labour market information, career services and child care. Many lessons flow from these initiatives:

Improved Labour Market Information

- labour market information is key to improving employment prospects. Yet many clients face barriers in accessing such information, including: lack of time, lack of knowledge of where to find resources, lack of comfort with information technology, and information overload;

- there are particular problems in accessing information that is suitable for secondary school audiences, those with low literacy levels and specific groups such as aboriginal people and women. There are also problems accessing information on realistic entry-level job opportunities and vocational employment;

- strong partnerships among the federal and provincial governments and developers and users of labour market information are key to the success of these support programs. The challenges of partnerships are most successfully handled by involving partners in all stages of the program, and through effective communication, incorporating meaningful consultation, feedback of information, and follow-up.

Improved Career Services

- government and community partnerships, involving information sharing and joint-service delivery are key to improving career-related services;

- private sector involvement and focus in the provision of support services were critical to their success;

- addressing service-delivery gaps requires the involvement of all partners in the identification, planning and delivery of services;

- clients facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency need a continuous package of services. Employment-related programs for this target group need to be linked to local community economic needs;

- to achieve positive impacts from the provision of support services, such as assessments and counselling, it is important that clients" expectations for follow-up programs are met.

Improved Access to Child Care

- the lack of affordable, high quality child care is a barrier to accessing employment opportunities;

- although community consultation is time-consuming, it is critical to the establishment of child care programs. Early and in-depth community consultation is necessary to assess needs accurately, provide adequate information and build community support.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships among public, private and non-profit sectors formed a key element of the Strategic Initiatives program. Each partner brings different strengths to the partnerships:

- the federal government brings its funding and human resource development delivery expertise. It also contributed to the evaluation of these new Initiatives;

- the provincial and/or local governments (supported by community organisations), on the other hand, contribute their understanding of the local community — both in terms of the supply and demand for labour and client needs;

- community partnerships are particularly important for an appropriate program design, identification of local needs and assessment of the job readiness of clients. However, the process must be (and be perceived to be) open and fair, perhaps through the involvement of local advisory committees;

- in order for clients to meet their income needs from employment rather than through government assistance, it is important to involve the private sector in both the design and implementation of activities.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

- true partnerships involve shared vision and objectives, open communications, shared responsibility and power, and the ability to acknowledge and support differences between partners. By this definition, not all Strategic Initiatives partnerships are true partnerships. However, many Initiatives did involve a range of stakeholders.

- effective collaborations — if not true partnerships — involved a range of partners, including partners from the public, private and non-government sectors;

- although too early to assess, co-management and integration of services may reduce the overlap and duplication in the provision of services to client populations and increase the efficiency in the use of resources;

- third-party delivery mechanisms may be effective vehicles for providing client and community-oriented services, reducing duplication and improving participant access.

Impact and Challenges of Partnerships

- effective partnerships evolve when the selection of the partners is based on the needs defined by the program objectives. When partnerships are established in the absence of program objectives, there may be a lack of agreement among partners as to the role and objectives of the program and this may result in weakness in program design and delivery and conflict among the partners;

- lack of clarity on objectives may mean that partners have to spend considerable time identifying shared principles and approaches rather than on ways to pool their expertise and resources;

- when partnerships do not evolve naturally, considerable resources are required to develop the partnership infrastructure and this requires extensive commitment from program staff;

- the involvement of non-profit organisations in partnerships with government requires a commitment of resources which needs to be recognised.

Improved Program Mechanisms

Lessons were learned with respect to improved program design and delivery mechanisms, including innovative approaches to programming and the lessons learned about the process of implementing new initiatives. The impact of the improved mechanisms for employment programs will only be known when the summative evaluations are carried out.

Programming Lessons

- sufficient time needs to be allowed for the process of designing and developing new programs, establishing partnerships, developing pilot projects and testing innovative approaches to third-party delivery. Not allowing sufficient time can result in confusion, frustration and breaks in communications with program stakeholders;

- programs for clients facing barriers to labour force attachment need to be appropriately tailored for individual needs and this individualised planning should be reflected in personal action plans;

- individual action plans should include a range of preparatory programs (assessments, counselling, literacy and life skills training and academic upgrading) and training and/or work experience programming. Programs need to be paced to meet individual needs;

- programs need to address barriers to program participation. This may require providing financial assistance for day care, transportation or a daily allowance in addition to their income assistance;

- when individual plans are developed, tools have to be put in place to support the implementation of these plans;

- development of individualised plans which shift from supply-side to demand-side identification of services to be offered at the community level is particularly important for clients with disabilities;

- individual action plans need to reflect realistic job expectations for clients. These are often more important in achieving program success than the career-relatedness of a job placement. Program exposure can contribute to the development of more realistic job expectations;

- the continuum of interventions reflected in the individualised plan needs to include program follow-up, including an on-going training plan;

- programs for those facing long term dependency on government assistance must offer incentives for program participation which are adequate to overcome the benefits of government assistance;

- programs for those facing barriers to labour market attachment need to be flexible. Rigidity can work against the implementation of individualised action plans and may prevent some clients from accessing the program and other services;

- programs for those dependent on government assistance need to be designed to allow for a gradual withdrawal of support to ensure that they do not create a new dependency. Clients can become dependent on the program support or the program participant groups;

- flexibility allowed some programs to respond rapidly to clients and industry needs by offering an open and inclusive structure and a non-bureaucratic management style. Flexibility was reflected in flexible schedules, non-traditional training environments and the innovative use of new technologies;

- the cost-effectiveness of new programs may be compromised when they are implemented on a small-scale and for a limited time period.

- flexibility is needed to adjust existing administrative systems and supports to meet the needs of new programming approaches;

- the role of program counsellors or facilitators was key to the success of some programs to reduce dependency on government assistance. In addition to their program delivery role, they also serve as positive role models and may contribute to the development of realistic career goals and reductions in program drop-out rates;

- the appropriate skills for these counsellors/facilitators include counselling skills, access to information, understanding of local client and employer needs, and expertise in business, training and community economic development;

- innovative technologies provide opportunities for improving client services and increasing access to services.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Initiatives (SI) program was set up in March 1994 to promote the development of innovative social programming to address the changing needs of Canadians. The emphasis was placed on testing new approaches to help Canadians develop skills, get work and participate more fully in society.

Programming has been targeted to the needs of specific groups of Canadians, including Canadians with disabilities, Aboriginal Canadians, lone parents, children, displaced older workers, students, youth, high school drop outs, long term social assistance recipients (SARs), people making the transition between home, school and work, and those whose Employment Insurance benefits have come to an end.

Initially the federal Government committed $800 million for a two-year program. This money was subsequently re-profiled to cover the four-year period 1995/96 to 1998/99. Subsequently the 1995 Federal Budget reduced the total program amount to $413 million. With this budget cut, the federal government committed to respect all existing Initiative announcements made to date and to preserve funding for those provinces and territories which had not yet concluded agreements. A specific amount of $26 million was set aside over the four years for Aboriginal Strategic Initiatives.

As of December 1997, twenty-four Strategic Initiatives — affecting 100,000 people including more than 5,000 young people, 16,000 single mothers and their children, and 1,000 older displaced workers — had been announced. These initiatives cover a broad range of issues: education and training, child care, income security and social services. Twenty-three Aboriginal initiatives had also been announced.

Although a range of themes has emerged from the programming to date, the primary focus of the initiatives has been on employability and training.

This document summarises the lessons from the formative evaluations of nineteen projects funded under the Strategic Initiatives program. The focus of this exercise was to identify the lessons learned in a number of broad policy areas:

- supporting poor families and children;
- supporting youth;
- addressing long term dependency among the working age population;
- assisting individuals to overcome barriers to employment;

- partnership and policy/program integration between governments;
- partnership and co-operation with the non-profit sector;
- partnership and co-operation with the private sector;
- reducing reliance on government assistance;
- job creation; and
- initiating a new program.

Not all projects addressed all policy areas. Commonly, they focussed on one or two areas. However, this is not to say that they did not also provide lessons learned in policy areas other than the ones on which they were primarily focussed.

1.1 Notes on the Methodology

The lessons which are summarised were drawn from formative evaluations for nineteen projects. (A list of the evaluations reviewed is provided in Appendix A.) The consultants reviewed these evaluation reports and initially rated the extent to which each of the ten policy areas were relevant to that particular project and, if appropriate, the strength of the evaluation findings.

They then prepared a summary sheet for each project which identified the lessons appropriate for each specific policy area. These were reviewed by the Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC) client to confirm the consultants" assessment of the lessons learned from the evaluation reports. Based on their feedback, final summary sheets were prepared and used as working documents for the preparation of this report.

The identification of lessons learned was based solely on the formative evaluation reports. These reports have some limitations as sources of information on lessons learned:

- the evaluations were conducted at different stages of implementation of the projects. The evaluations reflect the status of projects at the time of the evaluation. However, many projects have evolved considerably since that time. The lessons learned and reflected here may be somewhat dated;
- given the variety of Strategic Initiatives programming and the range of activities covered in the formative evaluations, some lessons learned have been based on the experience of very few projects;

- the evaluations were formative and, consequently, the emphasis tended to be on providing feedback on implementation to facilitate taking corrective action to maximise the achievement of project objectives. The lessons learned are, therefore, preliminary and tend to be more process rather than outcome-oriented. In general, although a particular policy area might be of relevance in a given project, the strength of the evaluation findings pertaining to that policy area was frequently much weaker than the relevance of the area;

- the fact that this was a first experience in federal/provincial evaluations had an impact on the consistency of the evaluation reports. Since programming was developed and the evaluations were conducted at a regional level, this limited the ability of the federal government to ensure consistency in the evaluation approaches;

- a wide variety of consultants conducted the evaluation studies and there is significant variation in the quality and style of the reports.

1.2 Framework for the Summary of Lessons from Strategic Initiative Formative Evaluations

Even though many lessons from Formative Evaluations are only tentative, the review of the evaluation reports produced considerable information about employment supports and related programming. The challenge was to find a way to organise these lessons which would be useful for future programming and yet address the ten policy areas of specific interest to the Department.

To do this, the lessons have been divided into four sub-groups, based on their focus. The first three sub-groups cover the lessons learned from the types of activities which projects supported (the "what"). The final group covers lessons on the process of implementing these Strategic Initiatives (the "how").

- Firstly, there are lessons about activities which address **barriers to employment and long term dependence on income support**. These projects contribute directly to increasing employment opportunities, reducing reliance on government assistance and addressing barriers to long term attachment to the labour force. These typically include training activities, projects to subsidise clients gaining work experience and business development support projects.

- Secondly, there are lessons about project activities which provide **improved program supports** — activities which contribute indirectly to improving employment opportunities by addressing specific barriers to accessing employment-related programming and employment. This includes, for example, improving assessment and counselling, increasing

access to child care and providing better labour market information. Also included here are lessons from one project not specifically related to employment but which addressed issues related to the way in which a specific client group — persons with disabilities — receives services and supports.

- Thirdly, there are lessons related to the **partnerships** which formed a key element of the Strategic Initiatives program. This included partnerships among public, private and non-profit sectors.

- Finally, there are lessons on **improved program design and delivery mechanisms**, including innovative approaches to programming and the lessons learned about the process of implementing new Initiatives.

The report is organised around these four types of lessons. One chapter is devoted to each sub-group of lessons.

1.3 Coverage of Policy Areas

Ten broad policy areas provided the framework for the review of the formative evaluations. All policy areas are covered in the report. Table 1.1 below illustrates the relationship between the chapters and the policy areas. However, there will be overlap and duplication in the coverage of the policy areas in order to highlight the specific aspects of the Initiatives.

Table 1.1:
Match between Chapters and Policy Areas

Chapter	Policy Areas
2.0 Addressing Barriers to Employment and Dependence on Income Support	• Addressing Long term Dependency Among the Working Age Population • Reducing Reliance on Government Assistance • Job Creation • Supporting Poor Families and Children • Supporting Youth (non-employment related projects)
3.0 Improved Support Programs	• Assisting Individuals to Overcome Barriers to Employment
4.0 Partnerships	• Partnership and Policy/Program Integration Between Governments • Partnership and Co-operation with the Non-profit Sector • Partnership and Co-operation with the Private Sector
5.0 Improved Program Mechanisms	• Innovative Approaches • Initiating a New Program

Providing assistance to individuals to overcome barriers to employment was the most relevant of the objective policy areas, in that it was addressed in the largest number of Strategic Initiatives reviewed. Almost all projects covered by the evaluations, included activities which addressed barriers, either to employment or to employment-related programs. The least relevant policy area was job creation. In only four of the nineteen evaluations reviewed was this policy area identified as being of high relevance. It was of medium or low relevance in an additional four projects.

In terms of target groups, youth were of greater relevance in the projects reviewed than poor families. In over half the projects, targeting youth was rated as being of high relevance. In only five projects was support to poor families and children of high relevance.

The goal of the Strategic Initiatives was to develop new approaches to providing support services to Canadians. As a result, it is not surprising to find that different programming approaches were of relatively high relevance in most projects. Projects focussed particularly on promoting partnerships and co-operation between government and with the non-profit sector. There was noticeably less focus on promoting partnerships with the private sector. In addition, all but one project provided the opportunity to initiate a new program.

As would be expected in formative evaluations, there were strong evaluation findings with respect to the programming approaches. Findings with respect to the experience of setting up new initiatives and the partnerships between governments and, to a lesser extent, the partnerships between government and the non-profit sector were clear. The process-oriented findings were much stronger than the outcome-related findings. There were virtually no evaluation findings on program impacts, particularly with respect to specific target groups. Findings with respect to addressing the barriers to employment were the one exception to this statement.

As a result, the focus of the lessons with respect to programming objectives and target groups presented in this report are based on different programming ideas which have been tried and which are expected. but not proven, to be successful in meeting the program objectives. It is only with the summative evaluation that information will be provided on whether any or all of these lessons are confirmed.

2.0 ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT AND DEPENDENCE ON INCOME SUPPORT

Individuals unable to overcome barriers to labour force attachment are, depending on their circumstances, eligible for, and receive, income support in Canada. The large number of Canadians dependent on income support was, and remains, a pressing concern to both the federal and provincial governments.

The federal government has reduced spending on income support through revisions to employment insurance eligibility and benefit levels. These were designed to motivate individuals who have the option of meeting their income requirements from the labour force rather than from government income support. Yet they also reflect federal government fiscal realities. Changes to employment insurance — unless both levels of government are effective in reducing dependence on government-provided income support — could increase the call for social assistance. This creates the risk of an unintended transfer of unsustainable costs from the federal government to provincial governments.

For those on long term support, there are two fundamental constraints to meeting income needs from employment rather than from government support. The first is the lack of jobs in the economy and the second is barriers which individuals face in accessing available jobs. Most Strategic Initiatives reviewed focussed specifically on activities to reduce the impact of these constraints.

The first section of this chapter highlights lessons learned from projects which contributed to the creation of new jobs in the economy. The next section is devoted to lessons learned from projects which address specific barriers which those on long term assistance face in accessing employment.

2.1 JOB CREATION

Three Strategic Initiatives specifically focussed on job creation for both individuals who are already dependent on government assistance and those at risk of becoming dependent. One program provided wage subsidies for job creation and two provided training and loans to enhance self-employment.

WAGE SUBSIDIES

The ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** (SEOP) (Newfoundland) was designed to address both the lack of jobs in a province with a very high level of unemployment and poor access to jobs. The program used wage subsidies to create full-time jobs for individuals who would otherwise be at risk of future dependence on income support programs. The program encouraged new and expanding private sector firms to create jobs faster than their available capital might otherwise allow. In the non-profit sector, it funded initiatives which offered potential for sustainability through revenue generation or offered clear economic benefits in terms of development of valuable economic infrastructure.

The wage subsidy program attempted to achieve two objectives — the creation of jobs and the hiring of individuals who would not otherwise have been hired. The literature review conducted for the evaluation indicated that general wage subsidies are more appropriate to support job creation in economies with significant potential for economic expansion than in other contexts. This suggests that the rationale for their use in Newfoundland and Labrador was high. Under the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program***, the opportunity for effectiveness of these subsidies was enhanced by tying their allocation to the province's strategic economic development plans. However, it is likely that they would have been more effective if they had been tied to local, as opposed to provincial, economic development plans. In this way, the subsidies could have addressed clearly identified local needs.

Lesson: General wage subsidies are more appropriate to support job creation in economies with significant potential for economic expansion than in other contexts and are particularly effective when tied to local economic development plans.

The literature review conducted for the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** evaluation also notes that general wage subsidies to support job creation will offer very limited benefits if not properly designed and targeted. Targeting reduces the risk that jobs created with program support would have been created even without program support (dead-weight loss) and increases the chances that these job opportunities go to those who are the focus of the program.

Lesson: General wage subsidies offer limited benefits for job creation if not properly designed and targeted in order to reduce the risk that jobs would have been created even without program support (dead-weight loss).

The literature review also notes that targeted wage subsidies have been most effective when they focus on providing opportunities for employing individuals

with a perceived (but not an actual) employment disadvantage. In those circumstances, employers can be enticed to hire someone they might otherwise not have considered hiring and the employee receives the opportunity to demonstrate her/his productivity to the employer and is often retained by the employer beyond the period of the subsidy. Conversely, targeted wage subsidies (in isolation) are not typically effective with truly unproductive individuals since their employment will end with the subsidy.

Lesson: Targeted wage subsidies are most effective when they focus on providing opportunities for employing those who have perceived (but not actual) employment disadvantages. In isolation, however, they are not typically effective with truly unproductive individuals since their employment will end with the subsidy.

The ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** provided subsidies to employers in the private and non-profit sectors with differing results. The evaluation notes that, since projects in the private sector were assessed primarily on whether jobs were created through general wage subsidies, rather than on whether they encouraged employment of individuals with a barrier to employment through targeted subsidies, the program provides little evidence of the effectiveness of targeted wage subsidies for private sector employers.

Subsidies to the non-profit sector bring the risk of creation of "make-work" projects. The program attempted to reduce this risk by funding initiatives which could generate sufficient revenues to be self-sustaining or support local economic development through the creation of infrastructure. In the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program***, this risk was reduced by linking funding to the province's strategic economic plan. However, this plan was relatively new and regional plans did not yet exist. As a result, the projects could not be linked to local, as opposed to province-wide, economic development initiatives. This was a barrier to the selection of projects. Nevertheless, the evaluation findings provide evidence that individuals were employed "in meaningful positions with potential for the long term."

SELF-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Two programs supported job creation through enhancing participants' self-employment possibilities. The ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** (GESEP) (Newfoundland) provided income support and entrepreneurial training to recent graduates who wish to establish their own business. A similar program was set up in Nova Scotia. However, this program — the ***Enterprise Development Option*** (DE) of the ***Compass*** program — targeted social assistance recipients, not students. It also provided training and loans to enable them to establish small businesses.

Both self-employment initiatives represent innovative approaches to providing self-employment supports which were not otherwise available for the specific target groups. The ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** served recent graduates who would not likely be eligible for self-employment supports under *Employment Insurance (EI) Part II* employment benefits and support measures. The apparent success of the program in encouraging the establishment of new businesses suggests that the program has contributed to reducing the risk of future dependency of post-secondary graduates.

The cost effectiveness of self-employment support programs is questionable when benefits are provided to individuals who would not otherwise be receiving government support. The ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** provided support to recent graduates who would not otherwise have been receiving government support. Thus, the program represents an additional cost to government. Although the literature suggests that self-employment programs work, they do not have a big impact. The cost-effectiveness of this type of program is questionable.

Similarly, the ***Enterprise Development Option*** component of ***Compass*** was innovative since there had not previously been a provincial program to support self-employment initiatives for SARs. The evaluation indicates that the component is working as intended and that, overall, it has proven to be a valuable addition to the employment programming options available to SAR clients. However, given the complex nature of the target group — clients with a range of employment-related needs — concerns were raised about how best to support the client group in the development of business plans.

Lesson: Self-employment programs which provide subsidies to individuals who would not otherwise be receiving government support may not be cost-effective.

2.2 Addressing Barriers to Employment

Long term dependence on income support is directly related to the lack of jobs and to barriers which individuals face in accessing available jobs. There are essentially three types of barriers to employment:

- ***motivational barriers:*** Some individuals find that the opportunities offered them by the labour market are inferior to the opportunities offered by income support. To address this issue, governments fine-tune and, in some cases, make significant changes to their income support programs to minimise disincentives to employment. Although these initiatives fall outside the scope of Strategic Initiatives, many Strategic Initiatives had to take into account these motivational barriers;

- ***mismatch with the labour market:*** The skills of many individuals do not match with the needs of the labour market. This may be due to lack of training or experience or low levels of literacy. It may be due to where they live. It may be because the labour market misjudges their abilities or perceives that they are problematic (e.g., persons with a disability or individuals with a history of personal difficulties). These perceptions limit the opportunities likely to be presented to individuals. Many of the Strategic Initiatives projects are intended to help individuals to improve their match to the labour market;

- ***trends of past unemployment:*** Past unemployment often leads to future unemployment. This occurs both because of the impacts on individuals' self-esteem and also because employers naturally avoid individuals with a history of unemployment. Many Strategic Initiatives projects have focussed on individuals with histories of high unemployment and attempted to improve their self-esteem and appeal to employers. Governments around the world have had limited success in this area. It is too early to determine the success of the Strategic Initiatives projects focussing on individuals with a high degree of past unemployment. There are, however, lessons learned on the design and processes of these projects.

Individuals may face one or more barriers to employment. Those who have been on government assistance for a long time typically face multiple barriers to employment. For example, lack of training or low literacy levels may have lead to a long history of unemployment which may have sapped the individual's confidence, resulting in greater motivational barriers to employment. These barriers may span several generations.

Other individuals, such as unemployed youth or recently displaced workers, face more limited barriers to employment. However, many have only short-term prospects in the labour market and are at risk of long term dependence. Support through Strategic Initiatives may avoid the initial lengthy period of unemployment which might lead to a lifetime of marginal attachment to the labour force. This can prevent a long dependence from becoming established.

Lesson: Prolonged unemployment — particularly for those with limited barriers to employment — may have serious negative consequences on the risk of future income dependency.

Strategic Initiatives supported activities to address both populations. However, the types of projects and the lessons learned from them are different.

2.2.1 Individuals Facing Single Employment Barriers

Strategic Initiatives which supported those individuals who faced single, or limited, employment barriers tended to be single-faceted — that is they provide only one (or few) interventions for clients — and focus on preventing, rather than overcoming, long term dependence.

Two programs, in particular, promoted very early interventions by providing employment supports to students or potential students before employment problems were established:

- the ***Student Work and Services Program*** (SWASP) in Newfoundland provided supports for work experience placements to students who were planning on returning to school. It provided compensation in the form of wages and/or stipends as well as tuition vouchers to individuals intending to attend a post-secondary education institution. Approximately half the placements with community agencies were reserved for SARs interested in pursuing their education;

- the ***Nova Scotia Links*** (NS Links) component of ***Success Nova Scotia 2000*** is a post-secondary internship program designed to facilitate labour market entry for students. It provided wage subsidies for career-related work placements in the private sector. While described as an internship program, the program included participants who were intending to return to post-secondary education after their program employment as well as individuals who had completed their education.

A third Strategic Initiatives aimed to prevent long term dependence but focussed on a target group which had begun to exhibit difficulties in accessing employment:

- the graduate employment component of the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** (GESEP) (Newfoundland) offered wage subsidies to employers who hire a recent graduate who has been unable to obtain full-time employment in his/her field of study. These students had been unemployed for only a short period.

The rationale for these three programs is founded in the knowledge that well-educated youth without work experience are likely to experience difficulties obtaining employment in the future. The literature review for the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** evaluation provides evidence that prolonged unemployment may have serious negative consequences on the future contribution of youth to society and their own independence. The apparent success of the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program***, for example, provides evidence that, for a relatively small investment, government

can reduce the risk of future dependency of post-secondary graduates. Although the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** focussed on providing experiences to participants rather than the creation of jobs, the program appears to result frequently in ongoing incremental employment of participants with their program employer.

Lesson: A relatively small investment by government can reduce the risk of future dependency of post-secondary graduates.

All three programs provided valuable work experience to youth. Although the experience was not necessarily career-related, the ***Student Work and Services Program*** evaluation provided evidence that realistic work experience can be more important than career-related experience.

Wage subsidy interventions for this client group appear to be successful because of the nature of the barriers faced by the target group. The programs focussed primarily on students with two barriers to employment: high salary costs for graduates and their lack of experience. As a result of this lack of experience, employers need to invest in training/mentoring and this represents a significant investment. The wage subsidy allows the employer to seriously consider hiring a recent graduate because they can off-set the costs of integrating the employee into the workplace. The ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** evaluation provides no evidence of greater or reduced effectiveness for the approximately one-quarter of program clients who were SARs and who may face more barriers to employment. The provision of targeted wage subsidies appears to be an ideal approach to addressing the employment barriers faced by recent graduates, particularly in areas like Newfoundland, where the school to work transition is hard because of the lack of jobs.

Lesson: Targeted wage subsides are ideal for addressing the employment barriers faced by recent graduates in areas where the school to work transition is hard. They allow employers to offset the investment costs occasioned because of the graduates' higher salary costs and lack of experience.

A key to the success of ***Student Work and Services Program*** was the tying of the program to continuing education. The program experimented with a new approach to ensuring that students who benefit from the program are those who are seriously planning on returning to school. A significant component of the compensation for students working under the program was provided in the form of tuition vouchers. Individuals placed with private sector employers received wages and a tuition voucher. Individuals placed with community agencies received a stipend and a tuition voucher. Youth participating in the program supported this use of tuition vouchers and early evidence suggests that participants were more likely to attend a post-secondary education institution

than in the absence of the program. However, the value of this education in avoiding future dependency is unknown.

Lesson: ***Tying wage subsides for students to the financing of their continuing education increases the likelihood that the participant will continue to attend a post-secondary education institution. The value of this education in avoiding future dependency is unknown.***

A second key to success of programs tied to continuing education was seeing the employer as a partner in the continuing education of the students. ***Nova Scotia Links*** of ***Success Nova Scotia 2000*** established partnerships with the private sector to provide realistic employment experiences. It was important that the program respond to both employer and participant needs. Students need career-related experience with a potential for long term sustainability and growth. Employers have to develop a commitment to being trainers and educating partners, and training modules need to link work experiences with career planning, entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency.

Lesson: ***The commitment of employers to being partners in education and providing meaningful work-related experiences is critical to the success of targeted wage subsidies for students.***

A third key to success of these programs is that initiatives are tied to local economic development planning. Like the Newfoundland job creation program (***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program***), the ***Nova Scotia Links*** linked the allocation of wage subsidies to economic development plans. Linking support for the creation of infrastructure to local economic development plans helped to avoid funding "make-work" initiatives that might occur in non-profit organisations. However, both the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** and ***Nova Scotia Links*** evaluations noted that it is more important that this linking be done at a community/regional level and involve regional development authorities than at a province-wide level.

Lesson: ***Linking the allocation of wage subsidies in the non-profit sector to local economic development plans helps to reduce the risk of funding "make-work" projects.***

The evaluations noted a number of risks to the use of wage subsidies to facilitate job placements.

There is a high risk of "make-work" occurring in placements, particularly with the non-profit sector. The risk, however, can be minimised by clearly communicating program goals to all partners and providing them with the necessary supports to make the goals achievable. In the ***Student Work and Services Program***, non-

profit employers understood the program's objective to be primarily one of helping individuals attend school through the use of the tuition voucher. Consequently, little attention was paid to the equally important goal of providing realistic work experience. A realistic work experience exposes the student to a structured employer/employee relationship which involves, among other things, job interviews, work planning and performance evaluations. In the evaluation, most employers indicated that they could and would have pursued this goal if they had been aware of it. Some organisations indicated they would require support from program officials to pursue this goal effectively.

Lesson: Realistic work experiences are more likely to be available to students if employers understand clearly the educational objectives of the targeted wage subsidies. A realistic work experience exposes the student to a structured employer/employee relationship which involves, among other things, job interviews, work planning and performance evaluations.

As with the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** wage subsidy program (Newfoundland), there is a risk of dead-weight loss if wage subsidies are not adequately targeted. The ***Nova Scotia Links*** appears to have helped students obtain career-related work experience, and encouraged employers (especially small, private sector employers) to undertake hiring which they might otherwise have not. The evaluation of the ***Nova Scotia Links*** found that although wage subsidies can help individuals with barriers to employment obtain employment, there is a high risk of dead-weight loss if they are not carefully targeted. In the initial year of ***Nova Scotia Links***, the program included placement of large numbers of students in co-op programs, many of whom would likely have been employed without program assistance. Management attributed this to the fact that existing coop programs had the necessary infrastructure and employer network in place to react quickly when the new program was announced. Given that there was considerable pressure to disburse program monies early in the funding, the program had to build on existing infrastructure and networks.

Lesson: If wage subsidies are not adequately targeted, there is a risk of dead-weight loss.

There is also a risk that subsidies for hiring students can have a negative affect on other employees. ***Nova Scotia Links*** was particularly helpful to small businesses in the province and, because one program objective was to provide financial support to students returning to school, the program deliberately set wages above market-rate levels. This provided students with the possibility of funding a return to school. Experience indicated that employers in relatively low-wage industries/districts experienced difficulty with their regular work force because of the relatively high wages received by students. The evaluation

suggests that, where employment programs seek to provide income to participants at above market-rate levels, alternate compensation forms may reduce the negative reactions of other workers. The evaluation proposed an alternative strategy similar to that used in the ***Student Work and Services Program*** in Newfoundland. In this program the negotiation of rates with employers is based on market rates, and the program provides an educational subsidy paid directly to the student consistent with the increasing cost of post-secondary education.

Lesson: Providing income to participants in employment programs at above market-rate levels may have a negative impact on other workers. Providing alternate compensation forms (such as tuition vouchers) may reduce these negative reactions.

2.2.2 Individuals Facing Multiple Employment Barriers

Other Strategic Initiatives addressed the employment needs of those facing multiple barriers to employment. This target group presents a much more complex problem to address. Formative evaluation results present less clear trends with respect to expected program results and, in some cases, the findings presented tend to be somewhat negative. The lessons learned reflect the fact that this is a particularly difficult population with which to work and the interventions are complex.

There were essentially two types of initiatives proposed to address the needs of this target group: those which were single-faceted, offering one (or few) interventions for participants; and those which were more multi-faceted and included a broad range of personalised services and supports. The summative evaluation will help us determine how well each approach works with this client group.

Single-Faceted Interventions

Two programs offered a single-faceted approach to addressing the needs of participants who faced multiple barriers to labour force attachment:

- two components of the ***Compass*** program (Nova Scotia) — the ***Work Experience Option*** (WEO) and the ***Transitional Training Option*** (TTO) — provided employment opportunities and/or work experience to job-ready clients receiving social assistance. The ***Work Experience Option*** focussed on youth, and the ***Transitional Training Option*** on skilled job-ready individuals and single parents;

- the ***New Brunswick Job Corps*** program is a voluntary program which offers placement opportunities in the public, private and non-profit sectors

with a guaranteed annual income. The program is available to older workers and provides the opportunity to free themselves from passive support and to contribute to the development of their community. These older workers face many barriers to re-entering the workforce, including their age, lack of mobility and the need for extensive retraining required to meet the needs of the new economy.

To date, the evaluations of the ***Transitional Training Option*** component of the ***New Brunswick Job Corps*** program indicated limited successes in reducing dependence on long term government assistance. The ***Work Experience Option*** component evaluation suggested potentially more success.

Although the wage subsidy offered under the ***Transitional Training Option*** component of the ***Compass*** program was relatively high, it appeared to provide an insufficient incentive for many SARs to leave the security of social assistance, especially when they had dependants. The evaluation noted that the component was not particularly suited to the needs of SARs who face multiple barriers to participation in the labour market, including lack of subsidised day care (affecting mainly single parents equally throughout the province), lack of transportation and/or travel-related expense coverage in most rural areas, and fear of losing drug plan benefits.

The lack of incentives in place to encourage these clients to seek self-sufficiency became a significant barrier to the success of the ***Transitional Training Option*** component of ***Compass***. The evaluation suggests that a different structure needs to be put into place to assist those who want to make a successful transition to work by increasing the wage subsidy level. However, the results might also suggest that employment-related programs cannot overcome the negative incentives to work which are built into the social assistance system, and that a more multi-faceted approach is required to address the negative aspects of dependence on social assistance. The evaluation noted that the provincial Department of Community Services was, in fact, undertaking a major review of income and employment support programs in order to come up with a new legislation that might resolve the issue of barriers to employment.

Lesson: A multi-faceted approach is required to address the negative aspects of dependence on social assistance. Employment-related programs cannot overcome the negative incentives to work which are built into the social assistance system.

The ***Work Experience Option*** component of the ***Compass*** program, on the other hand, has been more successful in providing youth with an opportunity to gain up to six months of work experience in order to enhance their employability. Youth participants in this program presented multiple barriers to labour market attachment. They were on social assistance, had been out of school for two years, needed both entry level work skills and career development and were

unprepared for more formal skills training. Yet, according to employers, the experience gained on subsidised work placements improved the employability of these youths. Like ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** in Newfoundland, an unexpected result was the number of students who were offered employment after they had completed their placement period. As with the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program***, the results of ***Work Experience Option*** suggest that the investment of wage subsidies for encouraging youth employment is successful because it encourages employers to take seriously the possibility of employing youth.

Lesson: The investment of wage subsidies for encouraging youth employment is successful because it encourages employers to take seriously the possibility of employing youth and helps them overcome their perceived disadvantages in the work force.

One factor which contributed to the success of this program was the use of Job Developers. The role of the Job Developer was to identify employers in the region who were interested in partnering with the ***Compass*** program and providing quality, on-the-job training for participants which linked to future employment opportunities. The focus was on how best to meet the employment-related needs of participants, reflecting the client-driven emphasis of the program.

The ***New Brunswick Job Corps*** program also provided one intervention for participants: a guaranteed annual income for workers participating in jobs in the private, public or non-profit sectors. Although the program had the employment-related objective of providing work placement opportunities for older workers, it also had other objectives which were unrelated to labour market participation. These included: having a positive influence on economic activities in the province, improving the physical environment of communities, enhancing the quality of life of participants and stimulating a sense of belonging and contribution to the community. The evaluation noted that the program achieved positive results with respect to all these objectives. The evaluation notes that the program is effective in meeting the needs of both participants and employers. The placements offer a meaningful work experience. The work accomplished is contributing to improvements in the overall quality of the environment and to improvements in the overall quality of life for participants. And, finally, many participants indicated that they would have remained on some form of income support had they not been offered a job opportunity through ***New Brunswick Job Corps***. However, based on the very limited information from the formative evaluation, only one-third of those who had completed the program and were interviewed for the evaluation had full-time employment after program completion.

Evidence from the evaluations of the ***Compass*** and ***New Brunswick Job Corps*** programs suggests that the single-faceted interventions may not be particularly

effective for those facing multiple barriers to employment. The exception was the initial success of the ***Work Experience Option*** component which may be attributed to the identification of appropriate employers and good matches between participants and employers.

Lesson: Single-faceted interventions may not be particularly effective for those facing multiple barriers to employment.

Multi-Faceted Interventions

Four Strategic Initiatives offered multi-faceted programs or services to those facing multiple employment barriers:

- the ***Ready to Learn*** program (Prince Edward Island) offered counselling, training and a wage subsidy program to young people who have low literacy levels. The aim of the program was to enhance the literacy level, education and job skills of those voluntary participants receiving employment insurance benefits or social assistance and who are at risk of becoming dependent on income support mechanisms;

- the ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) provided training and/or work experiences as well as an integrated package of support services to enhance employability of single parents on income assistance. The centre either provides the services directly or refers clients to existing services in the community. Services include pre-employment training; skills development; goal-setting and career planning; legal services; assistance with child care, health care, transportation and housing; and information on services at all level of government;

- the ***Integrated Training Centres For Youth*** (ITCY) was initiated in Alberta to test the value of customised counselling, training and work site interventions for youth considered at risk of long term dependence on public income support. Services include life skills training; personal coaching; job-specific training; and other support services, including child care, participation incentives, job coaching, mentoring and counselling;

- ***Investing in People*** (Northwest Territories) addressed the low skills and educational levels and the high rates of unemployment which characterise many Northwest Territories residents who were long term dependants, or were at risk of long term dependency, on social assistance. Services include career and employment planning and development; counselling; life skills instruction; and on-the-job training interventions.

Clients presenting multiple barriers to self-sufficiency need more monitoring, better planning, and longer periods of support, and may need a sequence of

training projects and work experiences. Although it is too early to assess the long term impact of these programs, two key features have been identified as contributing to successes in working with this population: offering an array of programs or services to clients, and tailoring activities to meet the specific needs of individual clients.

Several evaluations note the importance of a multi-prong approach. For example, the evaluation of ***Taking Charge!*** noted that the program illustrated that comprehensive programming is needed to enable those with multiple barriers to attain economic independence. Substantial and sustained services are required before positive outcomes can be observed.

Each of the multi-faceted programs for this population included some or all the following types of services:

- counselling services and/or the services of a facilitator;
- training in areas such as career planning, employment preparation, literacy, computer skills, academic upgrading and occupational skill training;
- allowances/incentives for program participation or training;
- wage subsidies for work placements; and
- a number of other support services and funding such as allowances for, or access to, child care; allowances for transportation costs; and other facilities.

When only some of these services were available, the need for additional services was often highlighted in the program evaluation. The evaluation of the ***Investing in People*** program (Northwest Territories) identified serious gaps which the program was unable to address, including problems with participant attendance, the low skill and literacy levels of participants, and the inability to overcome other specific barriers (such as financial barriers, lack of child care, and personal problems such as substance abuse).

Lesson: Clients with multiple barriers to labour market attachment need more monitoring, better planning and longer periods of support. They may require a sequence of training projects and work experiences.

Clients presenting multiple barriers to self-sufficiency need individualised programs to allow them to take advantage of the range of services being offered to address their specific needs and motivate them to participate in the program. For example, a key feature in the ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) was the

development of individualised plans that led to training or employment, with ongoing supports provided throughout the process. Similarly, the evaluation of the ***Investing in People*** program noted that training paths have to be developed for those who complete their interventions to ensure that individuals can progress steadily toward their personal and career goals. The evaluation noted that training and work experience projects should not be viewed as a one-time intervention.

Lesson: Programs for clients with multiple barriers need to be individualised to allow them to take advantage of a range of services. Training and work experience projects cannot be seen as one-time interventions.

Designing programs that are responsive to individual needs not only contribute to addressing specific barriers to employment but also contribute to motivating clients to participate in program activities. The ***Investing in People*** program discovered that problems arise if clients are not motivated to participate. Program participation was to be voluntary with selection being made by a community-based committee. However, more than half of those who entered the program did not complete it. A number of participants believed that they were required to participate and some had their social assistance benefits suspended when they left the program early. The evaluation noted that the resulting negative feelings could cause these individuals to avoid any future initiatives designed to assist them.

On the other hand, the ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) attempted to facilitate program participation and access to employment by making sure that a range of convenient services was available. The program attempted to accommodate clients by making program services available in the evening and by providing one-stop convenience with an on-site employment income assistance office for clients to pick up their cheques. A well-equipped day care facility was made available for short-term use. A computer laboratory and an "executive closet" with free clothing were made available for clients seeking employment. Participants received a small daily allowance in addition to their income assistance. The program also provided an employment facilitator to assist clients in developing career plans and obtaining pre-employment training, skills development and job placements.

Lesson: Programs for those with multiple barriers to labour market attachment need to address the barriers which prevent client participation in employment programs by providing support services.

Yet there are challenges to the implementation of individualised approaches. The ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** was innovative in providing incentives to participants to allow and/or encourage them to attend and complete

the training programs. It was expected that these incentives would be determined on a case-by-case basis based on individual assessments. However, agencies found it difficult to assess individual client needs and instead used a grid (based on living arrangements and number of children) to set incentive rates. This raises the debate between fairness and individualisation. The grid provides for a fairer allocation of incentives among participants but removes the benefit of a more individualised approach, which might more adequately respond to individual participant needs. There is evidence that other funds have been used to "top up" incentives, suggesting that the use of grids is not meeting client needs.

2.3 CONCLUSIONS

It is too early to assess the extent to which Strategic Initiatives have been able to reduce reliance on government assistance. However, the experiences, as reflected in the formative evaluations, provide some lessons with respect to this programming objective. The lessons vary according to both the target client group and the type of programming undertaken.

Both wage subsidies and self-employment supports have been used to promote job creation. The key to job creation is in linking human resource development programming to economic development plans, particularly at the local, as opposed to provincial, level. This contributes to the sustainability of the employment and, particularly with respect to the non-profit sector, to avoiding "make-work" projects.

The principal risk in programming for those clients who have single (or limited) barriers to employment — primarily youth — is that of dead-weight loss. If clients have limited barriers, then there is greater likelihood that they would have got the job without program support. However, in spite of the risk of dead-weight loss, the Strategic Initiatives evaluations suggest that the small investment which governments make in programming for this target group has the potential to reduce the risk of future dependency. The evaluations suggest that targeted wage subsidies work well for this target group, many of whom have a perceived (but not an actual) employment disadvantage. The subsidy allows the employer to try out a potential employee whom they might otherwise avoid and allow that employee to prove his/her worth.

For the higher need groups — those facing multiple barriers to attaining economic independence — more comprehensive programming is needed to address these barriers. Substantial and sustained services are required before positive outcomes can be observed. The programming needs to be designed to meet individual needs, and clients must be motivated to take part. Programs need to be "sold" to clients. It is premature to look to the formative evaluations for results for this target group. However, some evaluations do suggest that it may be important to focus not only on employment as an outcome, but also to

consider other, less tangible, more short-term benefits such as positive changes in the client's willingness to learn, improvement in life and personal skills, and increases in self-esteem.

3.0 IMPROVED PROGRAM SUPPORTS

In addition to the Strategic Initiatives which provided direct programming support to clients to increase their access to employment and economic independence, a number of Initiatives provided indirect support for the achievement of these objectives. They provided supporting services which increased access to labour market information, improved counselling and referral services for clients and increased access to quality, affordable child care.

The more direct service Initiatives — particularly those for clients facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency — provided a range of support services for clients on an individual basis. The Initiatives covered in this chapter focus on building the infrastructure at a system-wide, as opposed to the individual, level.

3.1 Improved Labour Market Information

Having access to high quality labour market information (LMI) is key to improving employment prospects. Two Strategic Initiatives focussed on improving such access:

- the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in Saskatchewan was designed to evaluate a province-wide integrated approach for the development and pilot testing of new multimedia LMI products. The ultimate goal is to develop a comprehensive automated labour market information network to gather, analyse and use information to better meet the needs of the Saskatchewan people;

- the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in British Columbia was designed to meet the need for the development, production and distribution of high quality and career-related LMI and, particularly, its integration into career counselling at secondary and post-secondary educational settings.

The evaluation of the British Columbia initiative highlighted a range of constraints which clients face in accessing adequate LMI. These included the lack of time to search for information or to explore the resources to determine their suitability and how they could be used, the lack of comfort with computers, the lack of knowledge about where to find the resources, and information overload. Particular problems were highlighted regarding access to information that is appropriate for secondary school audiences. There is an increasing need to provide more hands-on resources, information at lower literacy levels, assistance in learning how to use complex LMI, and information on realistic job opportunities at entry level and vocational employment, and information targeted for specific audiences such as aboriginal people and women.

Lesson: ***Labour market information is key to improving employment prospects. Yet many clients face many barriers in accessing such information, including: lack of time, lack of knowledge of where to find resources, lack of comfort with information technology and information overload.***

Lesson: ***There are particular problems in accessing LMI that is suitable for secondary school audiences, those with low literacy levels and specific groups such as aboriginal people and women. There are also problems accessing information on realistic entry-level job opportunities and vocational employment.***

The key feature in the achievements of both Initiatives has been the strong partnerships, not only between the federal and provincial governments, but also involving other developers and users of LMI. The evaluations reflected the importance of these partnerships

In the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in Saskatchewan, federal and provincial governments are working together as equal partners through joint decision-making, planning, communication, and overall involvement in LMI project development and implementation. However, partnerships have extended beyond these two levels of government to include LMI users and the general public as well. The benefits associated with partnerships have been achieved by successfully handling challenges through the involvement of partners in all stages of the program, and through effective communication that incorporates meaningful consultation, feedback of information, and follow-up. Considerable time and effort have been expended to develop the partnerships and substantial opportunities exist to realise continued benefits by working together.

Working in partnership was a positive key feature of the way the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in British Columbia operated. Representatives of the federal and provincial governments co-chaired the Initiative. Other partners included people from other provincial ministries, other Strategic Initiatives, government agencies and career practitioner organisations. However, there was a recognition that lessons could be learned about these partnerships. Appropriate partnerships should include business, industry, and labour.

Lesson: ***Strong partnerships among the federal and provincial governments and developers and users of labour market information are key to the success of labour market information programs. The challenges of partnerships are most successfully handled by involving partners in all stages of the program and through effective communication, incorporating meaningful consultation, feedback of information, and follow-up.***

The factors which contribute to, or detract from, these partnership arrangements will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.0.

3.2 Improved Career Services

Four Strategic Initiatives focussed on improving access to, and the quality of, career services (counselling, assessment and referral services) for those seeking employment opportunities. Two Initiatives were designed to address specifically the needs of people on income support:

- the ***Ontario jobLink*** program focussed on improving and co-ordinating existing labour market services for people on social assistance through the establishment of multi-service Resource Centres that provided information about training, education and employment opportunities in local communities. They involved partnerships between federal, provincial and municipal governments;

- the ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** (ACR) program in British Columbia was designed to test and demonstrate an enhanced assessment, counselling and referral system for people on income support.

Two other Initiatives were designed to meet the needs of the population, as a whole, rather than those of a specific target group:

- the ***Career Services*** program (Saskatchewan) was designed to develop and test (through three pilot projects) multi-media programs, products and strategies that would assist clients with the process of career planning and decision-making. The program developed improved infrastructures for the delivery of career services;

- the ***Community Skills Centres*** (CSC) in British Columbia facilitate training-related activities at the community level to help individuals and communities meet the challenges of economic change. The mandate of these centres was to strengthen the employability of individuals and to enhance the economic growth of communities, but not to work with specific target groups.

As with the improvements to the provision of LMI services, the projects to improve career services focussed largely on strengthening partnerships between the federal and provincial levels of government and with other community organisations. Some reflected more successes than others.

Lesson: Government and community partnerships, involving information sharing and joint service delivery are key to improving career-related services.

The ***Career Services*** program (Saskatchewan) involved partnerships with the two levels of governments as well as partnerships with community stakeholders. Federal and provincial governments are working together as equal partners through joint decision-making, planning, communication and overall involvement in development and implementation. Considerable time and effort were also expended to develop the partnerships with community stakeholders. Diverse organisations involved in labour market development and career service delivery, which previously worked independently, are working together, sharing information, and jointly developing career services and training programs.

The ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** program effectively produced enhanced results from combined efforts made by the various government organisations. There was joint planning, design, service delivery and accountability to government partners with equal opportunity for input from each partner. The partnership was developed to bring together more collective knowledge, experience and wisdom from the direct service delivery level of all levels of government and the community.

Community Skills Centres staff (British Columbia) were very good at creating partnerships and collaborating with community stakeholders. As a group, the staff possessed a combination of expertise in business, training, and community economic development. Some ***Community Skills Centres*** have been very effective because of the private sector focus to management or the business/industry base that was receptive to the ***Community Skills Centres'*** training services. Those that are less effective tend to be early in their development, lacking local industry leaders on their board, or not fully committed to the partnership idea. The ***Community Skills Centres'*** partnerships have reinforced the efforts of community leaders, educators, and government offices to create more awareness of the importance of lifelong educational and skills upgrading.

Lesson: Private sector involvement and focus in the provision of support services was critical to their success.

The evaluation of the ***Ontario jobLink*** (Ontario) program noted that partnerships between the federal and provincial/local officials and community agencies serving SARs offers potential benefits due to the expertise which each brings to the partnership. The Resource Centres established under the program were intended to pool the resources of three levels of government and community organisations, but the evaluation found that the extent of success varied depending on the planning process. Addressing overlaps and gaps in service at an operational level requires a clear identification of overlaps and gaps at the

outset, an active planning process, and continuing involvement and commitment of all parties. Reduction in the funding/services of the partners during the pilot has limited achievements of the partnerships in this program.

Lesson: Addressing service delivery gaps requires the involvement of all partners in the identification, planing and delivery of services.

The evaluations of the two programs designed specifically to address the needs of clients on long term social assistance — ***Ontario jobLink*** and ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** programs — concluded that the programs provided highly relevant services for this population. However, it is too early to assess their impact.

The evaluation of the British Columbia ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** program confirmed that, as was suggested in the previous chapter, clients facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency need a continuous package of services. In addition, employment-related programs for this target group need to be linked to local community economic needs. Services provided by this British Columbia program were specifically designed to meet the needs of the client group and reflect the importance of providing a range of individualised services. They included:

- an in-depth group assessment process was designed to help clients identify and assess employment barriers/challenges. This was the first component for those who face multiple employment barriers and are more likely to require more than one intervention in making the transition from welfare to work. It is based on a client-centred approach in which the participants, with the support of a trained facilitator, assess their barriers and strengths to formulate an individualised plan of action towards employment;

- a diagnostic assessment was provided by a professional diagnostician when the assessment of barriers appeared to be related to specific physical, psychological and/or learning disabilities;

- the learner support component provided clients with problem-solving and crisis management skills, links to community agencies and employers, and practical support required to reduce the personal/social barriers preventing them from achieving their employment goals.

Lesson: Clients facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency need a continuous package of services. Employment-related programs for this target group need to be linked to local community economic needs.

The ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** evaluation noted also that the provision of services to individuals on income support was highly dependent upon both private and institutional service providers in the community. Employers and agencies involved with community economic development were viewed as critical stakeholders in the success of training and employability programs to individuals on income support. They could also provide key information inputs such as local labour market data.

In spite of positive achievements, the ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** evaluation reflects uncertainty about whether the motivational effects of the program will last, since the sustainability of the outcomes appears to depend on whether the expectations for follow-up programs and other outcomes were actually met.

Lesson: To achieve positive impacts from the provision of support services, such as assessments and counselling, it is important that clients' expectations for follow-up programs are met.

3.3 Improved Access to Child Care

Among the logistic barriers to accessing employment opportunities, the lack of affordable, high quality child care was identified in a number of Strategic Initiatives. For example, the evaluation of the ***Investing in People*** program (Northwest Territories) noted that over half the participants did not complete the program. For some, the reason was their family responsibilities and the lack of child care options. The ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) recognised the need to make services convenient for participants and provided access to a day care facility for short-term use. The ***Compass*** program evaluation also noted that the lack of subsidised child care was one of the disincentives faced by SAR clients in the program, particularly single parents.

Lesson: The lack of affordable, high quality child care is a barrier to accessing employment opportunities.

Two specific community-based initiatives were undertaken in British Columbia to strengthen access to high quality, affordable child care services:

- the ***Improved Access to Child Care*** project which focussed on the consolidation of child care services to facilitate client access to services, and the development and testing of new approaches to providing support for, and delivery of, child care services;

- the ***Supported Child Care*** (SCC) project which was a community-based family support program to integrate children with special needs more effectively into the broader child care system.

The key lesson learned from these projects is the importance of early and in-depth consultation with communities in order to assess needs accurately, provide adequate information and build "buy-in". Without this consultation it was difficult to reach consensus with communities on needs and project activities were difficult to implement.

The evaluation of the ***Improved Child Care Access*** project notes that, in those projects in which there was inadequate community consultation, it was difficult to reach consensus with communities on needs. As a result, project activities were difficult to implement. Similarly, the critical nature of community consultation was also highlighted in the evaluation of the ***Supported Child Care*** project. The evaluation noted that although community development is a time-consuming process, it is recognised as the best approach for this type of initiative. It is also a big challenge to implement well.

Lesson: Although community consultation is time-consuming, it is critical to the establishment of child care programs. Early and in-depth community consultation is necessary to assess needs accurately, provide adequate information and build community support.

3.4 Non-Employment Support for Specific Target Groups

Although many Strategic Initiatives focussed on addressing the employment-related needs of specific target groups, only one addressed non-employment needs. The ***Choice and Opportunities*** program in Prince Edward Island was created to redesign existing programs and delivery mechanisms to increase the opportunity for individuals with intellectual disabilities to make decisions about how they want to receive supports and services. The project was also to assist agencies and community organisations to be inclusive of persons with an intellectual disability.

There were few lessons in the formative evaluation pertaining to the objectives of the initiative. The evaluation did provide some interesting findings with respect to process, specifically the role of partnerships.

The program involved a partnership between four parties including the Canadian Association for Community Living, the Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living and the federal and the provincial governments. This partnership was key to the implementation of the program. Yet the evaluation noted that there are critical elements to an effective partnership. These include sharing visions, responsibility, power, and resources; respectful, open, trusting, honest and equitable relations; and processes which are creative and supportive and building teams and addressing conflicts. These elements of an effective

partnerships will be considered again in the following chapter in the review of the extent to which all the Strategic Initiatives reflected effectiveness partnerships.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

Nine Strategic Initiatives focussed on providing support services, primarily to clients on long term social assistance. All but one was focussed on the provision of supports necessary to facilitate attachment to the labour force. There is a common theme to the lessons learned from these projects: partnerships are important for achieving program objectives. Whatever support is required — whether it be information, counselling/assessment or child care services — effective design and delivery of these services include public, private and non-profit sector partnerships.

Information is a key element to improving employment prospects. The two Initiatives which sought to strengthen processes of identification and dissemination of labour market information benefited particularly from strengthened partnerships. Both Initiatives involved partnerships with federal and provincial governments as well as community organisations (including users). Contributions of the federal government included resources, information and systems expertise. Provincial governments and communities contributed a greater awareness and understanding of local needs to the design and delivery of the LMI initiatives.

The support which those facing multiple barriers to labour market attachment require goes beyond access to labour market information to include other support services, such as counselling, assessment and referral services. Four Initiatives provided these services — two specifically for clients on government assistance. These initiatives recognised the importance of partnerships, particularly with community-level organisations and service deliverers, in achieving their objectives.

Two Strategic Initiatives focussed on addressing one specific barrier to employment — the lack of accessible, affordable child care. The evaluations of these Initiatives reflected the importance of strong community partnership in the design and delivery of services. Early and in-depth consultation with communities is necessary to assess needs accurately, provide adequate information and build "buy-in".

The provision of improved labour market information and other support services may achieve short-term positive results for clients. However, it is too early to assess the longer-term impact on reducing reliance on government assistance. Potentially this assessment of impact will be available from the Strategic Initiatives summative evaluations.

4.0 PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership is at the core of the Strategic Initiatives program. The program design set up the framework for public sector partnerships between federal and provincial governments: the federal government provided direct funding for programs and services through cost-sharing innovative programs developed at the provincial/territorial level. However, in many Initiatives, partnerships extended well beyond the two levels of government, to include municipal governments, communities and the private sector.

The importance of these partnerships was highlighted in a number of formative evaluations. On a general note, the evaluation of the ***Taking Charge!*** Initiative in Manitoba suggests that this specific Initiative and other Strategic Initiatives were modelled on the American *Job Training Partnership Act*. This *Act* was based on the idea that the partnership approach, particularly involving the private sector, was the most effective way to create training and employment opportunities for individuals facing, or at risk of facing, long term dependence on government assistance.

4.1 RANGE OF PARTNERSHIPS

The formative evaluations, in noting the importance of partnerships, noted the strengths which each partner brings to the partnership. For example, the evaluation of ***Ontario jobLink*** highlighted the roles of different partners. HRDC's experience in employment counselling was a useful resource provided to provincial and municipal staff serving social assistance recipient clients. Community-level partners, on the other hand, made an important contribution to the understanding of the needs and readiness of the client population.

4.1.1 PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

The overall mid-term review of the Strategic Initiatives notes three types of public sector partnerships:

- partnerships in which the provincial/territorial government takes the lead role in implementation of project activities, while the federal role is limited to cost-sharing and participation in joint management and evaluation committees;

- partnerships in which both federal and provincial/territorial governments play key, but distinct, roles in project implementation with activities

undertaken by one partner being independent of those of the other partner; and

- partnerships in which both partners take a lead role in specific components of the program but with both levels of government involved in overall program planning and management.[1]

The two levels of government brought different strengths to these partnerships. The federal government brought the opportunity through the program and its funding to test new approaches. It provided its human resource development delivery expertise, particularly in the areas of counselling and labour market information. It also contributed to the evaluation of these Initiatives. Evaluation was a critical element to the Strategic Initiatives program, particularly as Initiatives were to test new approaches to providing training and employment services.

The provincial and/or local governments (supported by community organisations), on the other hand, contributed their understanding of the local community — both in terms of the supply and demand for labour and client needs.

Lesson: ***Each partner brings different strengths to the partnerships. The federal government brings its funding and human resource development delivery expertise. It also contributed to the evaluation of these new Initiatives. The provincial and/or local governments (supported by community organisations), on the other hand, contribute their understanding of the local community — both in terms of the supply and demand for labour and client needs.***

4.1.2 COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

The involvement of communities was critical to ensuring the effective delivery of client-oriented services in a number of Strategic Initiatives. Community organisations include a range of organisations which are able to link initiatives to the target population. They include non-profit organisations, economic development agencies, educational institutions and labour unions. Their involvement contributed to the appropriate identification of local needs and was particularly important in those Initiatives which provided support services to clients, such as:

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1 *The Strategic Initiatives Mid-Term Review: Final Report*, Consultants Vision-Transition, February 21, 1997, p. 65.

- the evaluation of the ***Ready to Learn*** project (Prince Edward Island) noted the need to establish partnerships in order to develop local community support for the program and develop appropriate project designs;

- the evaluation of ***Ontario jobLink*** noted the importance of communities in the development and implementation of activities. This facilitates the identification of service gaps, and the building of community ownership. However, the evaluation also notes that there are pitfalls in community involvement. The process must be (and be perceived to be) open and fair. Without this, resentment can build up. On-going communication with communities — for example, through local advisory committees — is important;

- the two child care support programs in British Columbia — the ***Improved Access to Child Care*** and ***Supported Child Care*** projects — were community-based initiatives and the involvement, from the very early stages, of communities in their design and development was critical to accurately assess needs, provide adequate information and build "buy-in".

Lesson: Community partnerships are particularly important for an appropriate program design, identification of local needs and assessment of the job readiness of clients. However, the process must be (and be perceived to be) open and fair, perhaps through the involvement of local advisory committees.

4.1.3 Private Sector Partnerships

Given the nature of the Strategic Initiatives and their focus on ensuring that clients meet their income requirements through labour force attachment and not government assistance, it is clearly important to involve the private sector in both the design and implementation of Initiatives. This was reflected in several Initiatives in which private sector involvement was deemed to be positive, including:

- activities in the Newfoundland ***Student Employment Opportunities Program*** (SEOP) and ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Opportunities Program*** were linked to the province's strategic economic development plans to provide meaningful work activities which support local and regional business growth sectors. These links are important to reduce the risk of creating jobs with program support that would have been created even without program support, and to increase the chances that job opportunities go to clients targeted by the program;

- partnership was an especially important element in the development and delivery of ***Enterprise Development Option*** of the Nova Scotia

Compass program. Employers viewed the program as a partnership between themselves, the client and government agencies;

- the involvement of the private sector in the British Columbia ***Community Skills Centres*** (CSC) created more awareness at the local level of the importance of life-long educational and skills upgrading. Effective ***Community Skills Centres*** reflected a strong entrepreneurial bent in their management, or a business/industry base receptive to the training services the ***Community Skills Centres*** could provide. Those that were less effective tended to be early in their development, lacking local industry leaders on their board, or not fully committed to the partnership idea.

Lesson: In order for clients to meet their income needs from employment rather than through government assistance, it is important to involve the private sector in both the design and implementation of activities.

The importance of private sector involvement is also reflected in the evaluation findings for Initiatives in which private sector partnership was not as strong:

- in the ***Student Work and Service Program*** (Newfoundland) employers in both private sector and community organisations were not included in the program partnerships. This would have limited the extent to which the program assists with the school to work transition;

- the evaluation of ***Nova Scotia Links*** indicates that job placement programs should respond to both employer and participant needs. Students need career-related experience with a potential for long term sustainability and growth. Business partners need to be involved in developing training modules that provide realistic employment experiences to enhance school to work transition;

- the failure to establish effective partnerships with the private sector in the ***Ready to Learn*** program (Prince Edward Island) contributed to weaknesses in the program, notably in a failure to generate career-related summer job placements. Job placement was such an important part of the program and more attention should have been given to preparing for job placement activities;

- the evaluation of the ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) notes that partnerships with business were important but weak. Representation from business on the program centre Board or the establishment of a business advisory council could contribute to improving the job placement program.

Overwhelmingly, Strategic Initiatives evaluations reflected the importance of partnerships, either by demonstrating at least preliminary positive results of Initiatives or highlighting the weaknesses which Initiatives faced when there were inadequate partnerships. However, as will be seen in the following sections, those partnerships varied considerably and each type of partnership brings with it specific challenges.

4.2 Types of Partnerships

The ***Choice and Opportunities*** program evaluation (Prince Edward Island) provided an interesting list of the key elements that make up an effective partnership. Information from a literature review and the evaluation interviews suggests that an effective partnership should include such things as:

- a shared vision, the ability to share strengths and resources, and the capacity to support each other in pursuit of the project's objective;
- frequent and honest communications, respect for confidentiality, and the development of trust between partners;
- a willingness to share responsibility and power; and
- the ability to acknowledge and accept differences, develop on-going team building efforts and skills in conflict resolution.

By this definition, many partnerships implemented in Strategic Initiatives would not qualify as true, effective partnerships. Many did not involve, for example, sharing of resources. However, many Initiatives did involve other stakeholders in the design, funding, management and implementation of Initiatives — whether they be true partnerships or not.

Lesson: True partnerships involve shared vision and objectives, open communications, shared responsibility and power, and the ability to acknowledge and support differences between partners. By this definition, not all Strategic Initiatives partnerships are true partnerships. However, many Initiatives did involve a range of stakeholders.

All Initiatives involved the federal and provincial governments in, as a minimum, cost sharing arrangements. Other stakeholders were involved in different ways. For many, the involvement was as a collaborator rather than as a true partner, in that they did not share responsibility for program implementation. Others played a more significant role in co-management or joint delivery of services. Others had a contractual relationship with the programs through the third-party delivery of services.

4.2.1 COLLABORATIONS

True partnerships involve shared responsibility for program objectives. Beyond the joint federal/provincial funding of Initiatives, this was not the case in many Strategic Initiatives. However, most Initiatives did involve the establishment of working relationships between, or collaborations with, different partners for the design, development and implementation of activities. These partners may have either played an advisory role or participated in the delivery of program activities. However, they did not share responsibility for program funding and/or management.

Private sector employers have been involved as collaborators in Strategic Initiatives through providing work placements and on-site job training opportunities for participants. This occurred in Strategic Initiatives which addressed barriers to employment directly by providing work placements or on-the-job training — for example, the Newfoundland programs ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** and ***Student Work and Services Program***, the Nova Scotia programs ***Nova Scotia Links*** of ***Success Nova Scotia 2000*** and components of ***Compass***, the ***New Brunswick Job Corps***, Prince Edward Island's ***Ready to Learn*** program, Manitoba's ***Taking Charge!*** program, the ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** in Alberta, and the Northwest Territories ***Investing in People*** program.

Collaborations also strengthen programs providing support services. For example, in the ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** Initiative (British Columbia) employers and agencies involved with community economic development were critical to program success as they provided key information inputs such as local labour market data.

Private sector partners participated in advisory capacities in programs such as:

- the ***Integrated Training Centre for Youth*** program (Alberta) in which private sector partners were members of the employer advisory committee; and

- the Nova Scotia ***Compass*** program in which partners participated on regional advisory or liaison committees.

Lesson: Effective collaborations — if not true partnerships — involved a range of partners, including partners from the public, private and non-government sectors.

4.2.2 Co-management and Delivery of Services

Some initiatives established co-management or joint service delivery between two or more levels of government. Some resulted in the co-location of service deliverers. Examples include:

- the focus of the "One Stop Access" component of the British Columbia ***Improved Access to Child Care*** program was on consolidation of provincial and community child care services, and on the co-location of Ministry financial assistance workers and licensing officers with provincial child care support program staff;

- in the ***Compass*** program in Nova Scotia, staff setting up work placements were co-located with municipal employment counsellors. Counsellors provided more effective services than they would if they had also to be responsible for securing work placements;

- the ***Ontario jobLink*** project put in place multi-service Resource Centres to provide training information, education and employment opportunities in local communities. All Centres involved partnerships with the municipal, provincial and federal governments. Some also involved community agencies. Government partnerships were more successfully implemented than those with community agencies. The tight time frames for the design and development of Centres limited the extent to which full co-location could be implemented;

- the ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** Initiative (British Columbia) involved partnership between the federal and provincial governments which featured delegation of joint planning, design, service delivery and accountability responsibilities to the government partners with equal opportunity for input by each partner;

- the ***Community Skills Centres*** (British Columbia) had community and private sector decision-making boards. Through joint program delivery, ***Community Skills Centres*** were able to develop a local learning culture which had not been present in many businesses or among many individuals in the labour force when the program was established.

It is expected that the co-management and integration of services will reduce overlap and duplication in the provision of services to client populations, and result in more efficient use of resources. However, the formative evaluations cannot yet reflect the extent to which this has occurred and/or contributed to improved services and outcomes for clients. This will be important to assess in the summative evaluations of the Strategic Initiatives. It is also important to note

that this experimentation is not unique to Strategic Initiatives and has been carried out in other programs as well.

Lesson: Although too early to assess, co-management and integration of services may reduce overlap and duplication in the provision of services to client populations, and result in more efficient use of resources.

4.2.3 Third-Party Delivery of Services/Contractual Relationships

Some Strategic Initiatives involved community and other organisations directly in the delivery of services to clients in a contractual relationship with other partners. These organisations, operating at arm's-length from government, either offer services themselves or refer clients to other organisations and/or governments. Many Initiatives provided the opportunity for greater integration of programming and the co-location of services — a single window for accessing a range of services. For example:

- the ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) was delivered at a centre, providing a continuum of services, which is managed by a non-profit organisation with a board of directors selected by the community and the federal and provincial governments. These partnerships are very strong and offer the program important community insights. Non-profit organisations, private vocational trainers, and post-secondary institutions are actively involved in service delivery on a contractual, fee-for-service basis;

- the ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** (Alberta) are managed by non-profit organisations with provincially-managed contracts awarded to different agencies. For the most part, roles and relationships were clear and stakeholders were satisfied with the role and responsibilities as carried out;

- the Regional Delivery Models of the ***Improved Access to Child Care*** (British Columbia) program consolidated the delivery of child care services (including local planning, purchasing resources, training and workshops) under one umbrella organisation in each community;

- the evaluation of the British Columbia ***Labour Market Initiative*** noted that since non-profit organisations often do not have funds to bring to projects, a contractual relationship, rather than a true partnership, has to be created between the organisation and the funder. Often the organisation in the best position to identify the need was also the most appropriate choice to carry out the work to address the need. This may result in perceptions of

conflict in contracting with organisations represented on advisory committees.

Initial evidence from the national mid-term review of Strategic Initiatives suggests that, in at least some Initiatives, third-party delivery mechanisms are effective vehicles for providing client- and community-oriented services, reducing duplication and improving participant access.[2] However, whether this continues to be true, and the extent to which it contributes to improved outcomes for clients, remains to be seen in the summative evaluation.

Lesson: Third-party delivery mechanisms may be effective vehicles for providing client- and community-oriented services, reducing duplication and improving participant access.

4.3 Impact and Challenges of Partnerships

Some evaluations noted the challenges faced in implementing partnership. Initiatives in some provinces built on existing partnerships between the federal and provincial governments. For example, the evaluation of the ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** program (Alberta) noted that the program helped to strengthen and enhance existing partnerships established under other federal/provincial initiatives. In other provinces, the most significant contribution of the federal/ provincial government partnerships established for Strategic Initiatives may be realised in future programs. This partnership experience may have resulted in the establishment of infrastructure and/or networks which will be available for future programming. For example, the evaluation of the Saskatchewan ***Labour Market Information*** Initiative noted that partnerships are likely to be sustainable even if the specific projects do not continue. The high level of communication and information sharing will be maintained and that the partners will continue to work together as an permanent LMI advisory board or council.

There is limited information in the formative evaluations on the impacts of these partnerships. The strongest statements about the success of partnerships come from the Strategic Initiatives which focussed on improving support services for clients. Examples include the ***Labour Market Initiatives*** in both Saskatchewan and British Columbia; the ***Career Services*** program (Saskatchewan); the ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** program and the ***Community Skills Centres*** both in British Columbia.

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[2] Ibid., p. 37-39.

4.3.1 Evolution of Partnerships

Some attempts at partnerships under the Strategic Initiatives suffered early in the program from not having the time to let partnerships emerge naturally in response to program objectives. In the early months of the program, federal and provincial officials scrambled to design programs which would respond to the partnership requirement of the Strategic Initiatives. Both levels of government, as well as partners from municipalities and community-level organisations, were identified early in the process as potential partners in programming. This happened in many cases before the service gaps and needs were identified. The "how" to address the issues (that is, through partnerships) preceded the identification of the "what" (that is, the program activities themselves).

A more natural evolution of the partnerships — based on the identification of program activities and, based on these, the identification of the partners needed to implement programs — would have resulted in more effective partnerships. The implications of not doing this were reflected in the evaluation of the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** (Newfoundland). In this program, a lack of clear agreement among the partners as to the role and objectives of the program resulted in weakness in program design and delivery and conflict among the partners. The importance of taking time to develop partnerships is also reflected in the evaluation of the ***Labour Market Information*** program (British Columbia). It noted that appropriate partnerships (including government, business, industry, and labour) should actively be sought but that they take time to build and that a clear definition of roles and responsibilities is needed.

Lesson: Effective partnerships evolve when the selection of the partners is based on the needs defined by the program objectives. When partnerships are established in the absence of program objectives, there may be a lack of agreement among partners as to the role and objectives of the program. This may result in weakness in program design and delivery and conflict among the partners.

4.3.2 Lack of Clarity on Objectives or Shared Vision

The result of this evolution of partnerships is often lack of clarity and/or shared vision with respect to program objectives. As a result, some partners spent considerable time identifying the general principles and approaches on which they could agree, rather than identifying ways to pool their expertise and resources to address a specific task. For example, although all partners in the ***Choice and Opportunities*** program (Prince Edward Island) are very committed to the project and its objectives, the lack of planning, definition and development

of partner roles prior to the establishment of the partner committees led to these activities dominating the early work of the committees.

Lesson: Lack of clarity on objectives may mean that partners have to spend considerable time identifying shared principles and approaches rather than developing ways to pool their expertise and resources.

4.3.3 Resources Necessary to Support Partnership

When partnerships have not emerged naturally around common objectives and tasks, considerable resources are required to develop the partnership infrastructure to ensure that it works. The ***Student Work and Services Program*** evaluation (Newfoundland) noted that although initiatives with strong relevance and support from all parties can be successfully implemented even if the partners' roles are not clearly defined, clear definition of roles is necessary for the program to continue. In ***Student Work and Services Program***, individuals made strong personal efforts to assure the initial success of the program despite shortcomings in design and delivery. These individuals suggested that this level of effort could not be anticipated in future programs.

Lesson: When partnerships do not evolve naturally, considerable resources are required to develop the partnership infrastructure. This requires extensive commitment from program staff.

Similarly, the evaluation of the ***Choice and Opportunities*** program (Prince Edward Island) noted that additional resources and supports would be required to strengthen the partnerships. A facilitator could contribute to team building; a policy advisor could research policy implications and promote the development of a shared vision; and training and support should be provided to allow effective partnerships to emerge.

Other mechanisms to support partnership included joint committees and co-ordinators (***Compass*** in Nova Scotia and ***Ontario jobLink***); information exchange (***Compass*** in Nova Scotia); and staff secondments (***Taking Charge!*** in Manitoba).

Two evaluations noted that involving community organisations as partners in government initiatives has cost implications for the non-profit sector. The evaluation of the British Columbia ***Labour Market Initiative*** noted that the monetary needs of non-profit organisations need to be recognised since, without core funding, these organisations can not participate as full partners. Similarly, evaluation of the Saskatchewan ***Labour Market Initiative*** noted that the cost of the time which people spent on projects had to be acknowledged. Working

Group members committed a significant amount of time in addition to their other job responsibilities.

Lesson: The involvement of non-profit organisations in partnerships with government requires a commitment of resources which needs to be recognised.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Partnerships has been a key component of all Strategic Initiatives. By definition, federal and provincial governments have partnered through the cost-sharing of Initiatives. Other stakeholders, including community organisations and private sector partners, have also been involved. These stakeholders have been involved in a range of capacities — either as advisors or participants in programming; as co-managers of services or as third-party service deliverers. Many of the relationships are not, however, true partnerships since there is a lack of shared responsibility for program objectives.

Although there is as yet little information on the impact of the partnerships in terms of improving client services or outcomes, the formative evaluations suggest that partnerships — particularly with community organisations — have been successful. Partnerships with private sector organisations have, in general, been weaker but are, nonetheless, critical for programming to address training and employment needs of clients.

Once established, these partnerships are likely to continue after the end of Strategic Initiatives programming. This is particularly true of the federal/provincial partnerships which have positioned stakeholders for the development of labour market development agreements between the federal and provincial governments.

5.0 IMPROVED PROGRAM MECHANISMS

A second core element of the Strategic Initiatives program was the focus placed on testing innovative approaches to the delivery of services for people on, or at risk of facing, long term dependence on government assistance.

Strategic Initiatives were innovative in a number of ways. They were innovative in what they did and how they did it. Many of these lessons have already been discussed in earlier chapters of the report, particularly those relating to innovations in the programs and services offered to clients. This chapter highlights some innovative approaches in how Initiatives were implemented. It also outlines issues with respect to the processes of developing and implementing these programs.

The formative evaluations provided limited information on the success of these approaches. Their impact will only potentially be known when the summative evaluations are carried out.

Lesson: The impact of the improved mechanisms for employment programs will only be known when the summative evaluations are carried out.

5.1 INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

The formative evaluations identified a number of features in the programming approaches taken which have contributed to the success of specific Strategic Initiatives. However caution is required. Some features which might be referred to in this section as "innovative" are, in fact, not unique to the Strategic Initiatives and are also being tried in other programs.

Since Initiatives were aimed at helping participants make the transition from income support to employment, many sought to actively involve clients in the design and development of program activities. The importance of individualised programs — particularly for those facing multiple barriers to employment — was highlighted in previous chapters. To develop these, many Initiatives involved participants in the development of personal action plans and encouraged participants to investigate their own training or work placement opportunities.

Lessons were also learned with respect to other programming approaches of the Strategic Initiatives, including the importance of encouraging realistic job expectations and the availability of follow-up programs for clients and the need

for flexible and appropriate interventions. Other lessons were learned about the use of different programming tools: the use of counsellors/facilitators and innovative technologies.

5.1.1 Programming Lessons

Career and Training Plans

Programs need to be targeted and customised to address the specific needs of individuals facing barriers to labour force attachment. Individual plans focus on identifying suitable, individualised incentives for participation in programs, as well as the appropriate programming to address clients' barriers to employment. This individualised planning is reflected in personal action plans developed for and by participants.

Lesson: ***Programs for clients facing barriers to labour force attachment need to be appropriately tailored for individual needs and this individualised planning should be reflected in personal action plans.***

Several Strategic Initiatives focussed on developing individualised plans for programs participants:

- the ***Ready to Learn*** Initiative in Prince Edward Island was based on the development of individualised plans to provide literacy, life skills training, skills training and academic upgrading for SARs. The plans included a multi-stage approach to providing a supportive learning environment based on individual needs;

- the Manitoba ***Taking Charge!*** program involved the development of individualised plans for training and/or work experience programming designed to enhance the employability of single parents on income assistance. The development of individual plans allows for comprehensive programming to address the multiple barriers which clients face in attaining economic independence, including providing financial assistance for day care, transportation, and a small daily allowance in addition to their income assistance;

- the ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** (Alberta) was a community-designed, individualised, self-paced program to provide customised counselling, training and work site interventions for youth who had dropped out of school and were at risk of long term dependency. The training plans were used for case management of the client's program

participation and were reviewed during every site visit to ensure the client was progressing at an acceptable pace;

- the ***Assessment, Counselling and Referral*** program (British Columbia) involved client-centred group assessments in which income assistance recipients, with the support of a trained facilitator, identify and assess employment strengths, identify barriers/challenges, and formulate their own career goals.

Lesson: Individual action plans should include a range of preparatory programs (assessments, counselling, literacy and life skills training and academic upgrading) and training and/or work experience programming. Programs needs to be paced to meet individual needs.

Lesson: Programs need to address barriers to program participation. This may require providing financial assistance for day care, transportation or a daily allowance in addition to their income assistance.

Some evaluations noted challenges to the implementation of individualised approaches. For example, the ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** was innovative in providing incentives to participants to allow and/or encourage them to attend and complete the training programs. It was expected that these incentives would be determined on a case-by-case basis, based on individual assessments. However, agencies found it difficult to assess individual client needs and have generally fallen back to using a grid (based on living arrangements and number of children) to set incentive rates. The grid provides for a fairer allocation of incentives but removed the benefit of a more individualised approach, which might more adequately respond to individual participant needs. There is evidence that other funds have been used to "top up" incentives, suggesting that the use of grids is not meeting client needs.

Lesson: When individual plans are developed, tools have to be put in place to support the implementation of these plans.

The ***Choice and Opportunity*** program (Prince Edward Island) highlighted the particular importance of customising programming for individuals with intellectual disabilities receiving supports and services. The program promoted a shift from supply-side to demand-side and the development of individualised funding models. The literature review suggested that this is the key to achieving self-determination for this target groups. This relies on a well-developed system of service provision and requires that a wide range of supports and services are available at the community level. The evaluation identifies key indicators of effective individualised models, including:

- individualised payment models which are flexible to meet individual needs;
- support for those working with clients;
- individualised service planning; and
- involvement of the clients to the greatest extent possible.

Lesson: Development of individualised plans which shift from supply-to demand-side community services is particularly important for clients with disabilities.

Realistic Job Expectations

To enhance chances of success, individual client training or program plans need to reflect realistic job expectations for clients. The evaluation of the ***Student Work and Service Program*** (Newfoundland) indicates that realistic work expectations are more important in achieving program success than the career-relatedness of the job placement. The ***Ready to Learn*** program (Prince Edward Island) focuses on youth with very low literacy levels. Participation in the program appears to make individuals significantly less positive with respect to the work and training. A possible explanation is the fact that, through program exposure, participants may become more realistic about the job skills required to increase their level of employability. The Initiative also offered personal and career counselling by facilitators. The type of career counselling may also have contributed to the negative attitudes of participants. Yet it may also have contributed to the reassessment of career goals and resulted in participants becoming more realistic about what could be achieved.

Lesson: Individual action plans need to reflect realistic job expectations for clients. These are often more important in achieving program success than the career-relatedness of a job placement. Program exposure can contribute to the development of more realistic job expectations.

Follow-up to Interventions

The individual plans also need to reflect a continuum of interventions, including access to a follow-up program after program completion. The success of program interventions is linked to the extent to which expected follow-up programs are available. For example, the ***Assessment, Counselling, and Referral Strategic Initiative*** (Alberta) was designed to test and demonstrate an enhanced assessment, counselling and referral system for people on income support. The evaluation notes that it is unsure whether the motivational effects of

program components would be lasting and that the sustainability of outcomes for clients appeared to depend on whether the expectations for follow-up programs and other outcomes were actually met.

A similar problem arose in the ***Investing in People*** program (Northwest Territories) which provided for the delivery of personal and skill development, integration of government services at the community level, and community development activities for SAR clients. The evaluation noted that once the program intervention is complete, a training path needs to be identified for those who complete the project to ensure that they can progress steadily toward their personal and career goals. Training and work experience projects should not be viewed as a one-time intervention.

Lesson: The continuum of interventions reflected in the individualised plan needs to include program follow-up, including an on-going training plan.

Flexibility And Need For Gradual Reduction Of Support

Programs for clients facing multiple barriers to labour force attachment need to be flexible. Rigidity in the design of programs for this population work against the success of the programs in addressing long standing barriers. Rigidity in program design can also work against attempts to individualise program action plans. For example:

- rigidity in the ***Integrated Training Centres for Youth*** program rules may have mitigated against a more individualised approach in this program. There was a challenge associated with the operational definition of "at risk youth" in terms of eligibility and selection criteria. The eligibility rules may also have prevented some young people from accessing other services or welcoming other learning options because they did not want to lose the opportunity to participate in the program;

- legislative constraints hampered the success of the ***Ready to Learn*** program (Prince Edward Island). A significant number of participants did not meet eligibility criteria because of the rigidity of some unemployment insurance rules and social assistance benefit obligations. It was suggested that attention be given to possibly developing a training allowance formula with a gradual decrease from reliance on government assistance while the participants progress through their program.

Lesson: ***Programs for those facing barriers to labour market attachment need to be flexible. Rigidity can work against the implementation of individualised action plans and may prevent some clients from accessing the program and other services.***

These examples and others suggest that it is important to design support for those who are dependent, or at risk of depending, on government assistance by using program supports that can be gradually withdrawn. The challenge is to not create another dependence on the program.

The ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** (Newfoundland) evaluation notes that the self-employment component of the program, which provides a constant level of income support ending after one year, is at risk of creating program dependency and may lead to high incidence of business failure after assistance ends. There is a need to consider alternative schemes which incorporate a declining level of support after an initial period of constant support. Some program designs also tended to contribute to increasing dependency on support, rather than reducing it. The ***Ready to Learn*** program (Prince Edward Island) to enhance the literacy level, education and job skills of youth was based on a small group concept. This concept played a significant role in the delivery of the program and represented a strong form of support for participants. But it may also have created a form of dependency which may impact on self-sufficiency. For example, there may have been a reluctance to pursue college education beyond the confines of a local small group. Participants should be encouraged to mix in different small groups, if this is at all possible, instead of bonding with only one group and then seemingly clinging to it.

Lesson: ***Programs for those dependent on government assistance need to be designed to allow for a gradual withdrawal of support to ensure that they do not create a new dependency. Clients can become dependent on the program support or the program participant groups.***

Appropriate Programs and Incentives

A key challenge to meeting the needs of this client group is the need to provide incentives for program participation which are sufficient to overcome the benefits of government assistance.

For example, the ***Student Work and Services Program*** in Newfoundland found a new appropriate way to deliver work placement income to students returning to school. Rather than provide it entirely through wage subsidies, the program experimented with the use of tuition vouchers which enabled students to cover tuition fees for post-secondary education. Students who participated in the program were positive about the use of tuition vouchers, and preliminary findings

suggests that the use of vouchers increases the chances the student will return to a post-secondary education institution. However, the value of this education in avoiding future dependency is unknown.

The importance of adequate incentives is particularly key for clients facing multiple barriers to employment. The ***Compass*** program (Nova Scotia) provides two examples of the importance of providing appropriate incentives for program participation.

- The wage level provided in the ***Transitional Training Option*** for skilled job-ready individuals and single parents was insufficient to encourage family benefit clients to leave the security of social assistance. In addition, the lack of subsidised day care, the lack of transportation and fear of losing pharmacard benefits reduced incentives for clients to participate in the program.

- Similarly, the ***Enterprise Development Option*** of the ***Compass*** program found it necessary to increase the size of the micro-enterprise loan to assist SAR clients to establish and operate small businesses. This was necessary to allow for sufficient funds to leverage other financing.

Lesson: Programs for those facing long term dependency on government assistance must offer incentives for program participation which are adequate to overcome the benefits of government assistance.

5.1.2 Programming Tools

Specific types of programming tools were mentioned in the formative evaluations as having contributed to Initiative successes.

Counsellors/Facilitators

The use of counsellors and/or facilitators in program delivery have been key to success in some programs:

- in the ***Ready to Learn*** program (Prince Edward Island), facilitators were drawn from clients on social assistance or drawing employment insurance benefits who had the necessary academic qualifications. The personal counselling offered by these facilitators helped significantly reduce the dropout rate in the program. The positive modelling effect of the facilitators also influenced changes in participants' attitudes toward long term dependency. The evaluation notes that this factor was almost as important as the expertise and ability the facilitator may display in the transfer of knowledge. The facilitators may also have contributed to

clients revising their career goals to become more realistic about what could be achieved;

- Job Developers were key to the success of the ***Compass*** program (Nova Scotia). Making Job Developers responsible for placements meant that municipal employment counsellors could provide more effective counselling instead of focussing on placement activities.

Lesson: The role of program counsellors or facilitators was key to the success of some programs aimed at reducing dependency on government assistance. In addition to their program delivery role, they also serve as positive role models and may contribute to the development of realistic career goals and reductions in program drop-out rates.

The importance of the skill sets for these facilitators or counsellors was highlighted in a couple of evaluations:

- the Job Developer function in the ***Compass*** program (Nova Scotia) requires a blend of business and counselling skills, is dedicated to matching job ready clients with local employers;

- the ***Ontario jobLink*** program focussed on co-ordinating the program and service delivery of all three levels of government. The partnerships between HRDC and provincial/local officials and community agencies serving SARs offers potential benefits, namely: HRDC's superior expertise in counselling skills and access to information, and the other parties' superior understanding of the needs and readiness of the client population;

- one major strength of the ***Community Skills Centres*** in British Columbia was the extensive expertise of their staff in business, training, and community economic development.

Lesson: The appropriate skills for these counsellors/facilitators include counselling skills, access to information, understanding of local client and employer needs, and expertise in business, training and community economic development.

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Four Strategic Initiatives took advantage of innovative technology to improve services for client groups:

- the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in Saskatchewan piloted various innovations in partnerships, information collection, product development, and information distribution. Innovative technologies (including multimedia technologies) are being used for improved information distribution and accessibility and the program was designed to improve access to up-to-date technologies for partners. As a result of improved access to appropriate LMI, it is expected that planners and clients will make more informed decisions;

- similarly, under the Saskatchewan ***Career Services*** Initiative, projects were using innovative technologies for providing career services to people who previously did not have access to these services. Multimedia technology has been used for information collection and distribution, and the projects have been working together on the development of a Web site;

- the British Columbia ***Labour Market Information*** Initiative was established to be an innovative and experimental program in order to test different methods of collecting LMI, and different methods of dissemination, including the implementation of new technologies. The Initiative explore alternative delivery mechanisms, particularly the Internet;

- the ***Community Skills Centres*** (British Colombia) have also made excellent use of electronic technologies, including computer-based tools, the Internet and video-conferencing. Video-conferencing is used for training, meetings and interviewing candidates. The Internet is used for public orientation, access to labour market information, and high-level technical training and skills up-grading.

Lesson: Innovative technologies provide opportunities for improving client services and increasing access to services.

5.2 Initiating New Programs

Most, but not all, Strategic Initiatives were new programs. A few Initiatives built on existing or planned provincial initiatives. For example, the graduate employment component of the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** (Newfoundland) continued a largely successful provincial initiative. The projects proposed for the ***Improved Access to Child Care*** projects in British Columbia had originally been designed and scheduled for funding under the province's program *Child Care: Choice at Work.*

The formative evaluations identified some challenges to developing new programs within the context of the Strategic Initiatives program. The most significant was the time pressures to develop joint programs in a short periods of

time. However, this also provided opportunities for partners to demonstrate flexibility in adjusting to program constraints. However, it should be noted that these challenges to program development are not unique to Strategic Initiatives programs and are being faced in other government programming.

NEED FOR SUFFICIENT TIME FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

A key lesson learned from the process of initiating these new programs was that sufficient time must be allowed for program design and development. This was seen as particularly true if the programs involve partnerships. In some cases, the lack of time limited program results, at least in the early days of the program. Examples are drawn from a number of initiatives:

- the evaluation of Newfoundland's ***Student Work and Services Program*** notes that designing and implementing a new program in a partnership mode requires time and the active participation of all parties. In ***Student Work and Services Program***, all parties co-operated and created a design which was highly praised by participants, employers and key informants. However, the shortage of time meant that delivery procedures were not fully developed. This limited the success of the initial implementation and created stress among the partners. Yet individuals made strong personal efforts to assure the initial success of the program despite shortcomings in design and delivery;

- the ambitious employment targets under the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** and the large number of public sector partners led to receipt and approval of a diverse group of project applications. This diversity made it impossible to develop an effective program design. Evidence from the literature suggested that design criteria which would be effective for one type of project would be a constraint to effectiveness for other projects. The approach under the ***Strategic Employment Opportunities Program*** of using one common approach was judged to have significantly reduced the potential for an effective program;

- the evaluation of the ***Ready to Learn*** project (Prince Edward Island) noted the need for sufficient time to plan activities, establish partnerships, develop local community support, and increase awareness of the program. Limited time to plan and put the ***Ready to Learn*** project in place resulted in the need to change the planned design in significant ways. The flexibility needed to accommodate this redesign created confusion, frustration and breaks in communication with stakeholders;

- the evaluation of the ***Improved Access to Child Care*** (British Columbia) also noted the need to allow sufficient time for the development of pilot project models and for involving communities organisations. It noted that

although community development is a time-consuming process, it is recognised as the best approach for this type of initiative;

- the evaluation of the ***Labour Market Initiative*** (British Columbia) noted that the main factor which affected the ability to deliver the program in an efficient and timely manner was time limitations. Partnerships take time to build and ownership issues can interfere with the effectiveness of partnerships. As with the ***Student Work and Services Program*** (Newfoundland), people put in the extra time needed to make up for the limitations and keep projects moving;

- similarly, the evaluation of the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in Saskatchewan noted that the benefits associated with partnerships have been achieved by successfully handling challenges through the involvement of partners in all stages of the program and through effective communication incorporating meaningful consultation, feedback of information, and follow-up. However, considerable time and effort was needed to develop the partnerships, and substantial opportunities exist to realise continued benefits by working together.

The implications of the lack of time, combined with the need to develop innovative approaches and to develop the programs in partnership with other stakeholders (particularly communities), created challenges for the establishment of these new Initiatives. However, there were also opportunities for partners to demonstrate flexibility in addressing these challenges.

Lesson: Sufficient time needs to be allowed for the process of designing and developing new programs, establishing partnerships, developing pilot projects and testing innovative approaches to third-party delivery. Not allowing sufficient time can result in confusion, frustration, and breaks in communications with program stakeholders.

FLEXIBILITY AND AUTONOMY

The Strategic Initiatives program implemented a number of innovative features, including federal/provincial cost sharing and extensive partnerships with other levels of government and organisations, in many cases under significant time constraints. Considerable flexibility was required to adjust existing systems to meet these new programming approaches.

The option of third-party delivery of services provided autonomy for operations and contributed to the flexibility of programming. For example, since the ***Taking Charge!*** program (Manitoba) was being delivered by an independent agency, the program had the flexibility to respond rapidly to client and industry needs.

Similarly, the evaluation of the ***Labour Market Initiative*** in British Columbia, delivered through non-profit organisations, notes four key elements which made this Initiative work well. These included an open and inclusive structure, a flexible non-bureaucratic management style, flexibility and responsiveness independent of normal government structures, and the commitment of the people involved.

Flexibility in the delivery of services was also a key success factor in Initiatives delivered through joint federal/provincial programming. For example, it was not the mandate of the British Columbia ***Community Skills Centres*** to replicate existing services and simply out-compete them in order to become financially independent. The services were distinctive because of the added value of flexible schedules, non-traditional training environments, and innovative use of electronic technologies. ***Community Skills Centres*** offered training that was provided by other sources but not available from these sources in a location, format or schedule that met the needs of the trainee group that the ***Community Skills Centres*** was serving in that particular situation.

Lesson: Flexibility allowed some programs to respond rapidly to clients and industry needs by offering an open and inclusive structure and a non-bureaucratic management style. Flexibility was reflected in flexible schedules, non-traditional training environments and the innovative use of new technologies.

A number of Initiatives also demonstrated flexibility in the development and evolution of administrative systems for program implementation. This was noted in a number of evaluations:

- the evaluation of the Newfoundland ***Student Work and Services Program*** noted that the provincial government demonstrated flexibility in its interpretation of policies to overcome barriers to project implementation, particularly for the Community Services component of the Initiative;

- the implementation of federal/provincial cost sharing of the programs gave rise to the need for new approaches to the management and allocation of program resources, and many existing financial systems had to be adjusted to meet Strategic Initiatives needs. Initial challenges were overcome as the Initiatives evolved. For example, in the ***New Brunswick Job Corp*** program, the federal and provincial governments worked together to develop mechanisms to provide the annual guaranteed income payments to participants;[3]

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[3] Ibid., p. 30.

- the evaluation of the ***Career Services*** program (Saskatchewan) noted that flexibility in the development of administrative policies and procedures was good, in many ways, but has also resulted in some uncertainties in the process for partners;

- because the Saskatchewan ***Labour Market Information*** program was new to the province, many administrative policies and procedures had to be developed for distributing products and monitoring projects. These evolved over time as the LMI projects progressed.

Lesson: Flexibility is needed to adjust existing administrative systems and supports to meet the needs of new programming approaches.

Costs of New Initiatives

The evaluation of the self-employment component of the ***Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program*** (Newfoundland) suggests that the costs of designing a new program (initial high investments in design and delivery, as well as the inevitable mistakes and subsequent requirements for fine tuning) may be barriers to cost-effectiveness when a program is implemented on a small scale for a limited time period. The evaluation suggested that the program may be cost-effective if implemented on a larger scale with adjustments to design and delivery.

Lesson: The cost-effectiveness of new programs may be compromised when they are implemented on a small-scale and for a limited time period.

5.3 Conclusions

Innovation was key a component of the Strategic Initiatives. Innovative approaches have been incorporated into many Initiatives. Many lessons about these specific approaches and, more generally, about the process of implementing new programs are reflected in the formative evaluation reports. However, these lessons are certainly not unique to Strategic Initiatives. They might be reflected in many new programs. The challenges which they reflect are, in many cases, difficult to address. The constraints of time and resources, combined with the need to work with stakeholders, define the development of many new government initiatives.

The impact of these innovative approaches on program delivery and outcomes for clients can only be known when summative evaluations of the Strategic Initiatives are complete.

The mid-term review of the Strategic Initiatives notes the importance of evaluation for Initiatives and makes recommendations about the need to improve the communication of results.[4] Sharing this information are the Forum for Labour Market Ministers and the Ministers Responsible for Social Services, the HRDC Intranet and other ad hoc information sharing vehicles. This review of lessons learned is another.

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[4] Ibid., p. 67 – 68.

APPENDIX A:

EVALUATIONS REVIEWED

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Evaluation of the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) - Newfoundland and Labrador, Human Resources Development Canada, February 1996.

Formative Evaluation of the Graduate Employment/Self-Employment Program (GESEP), Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, March 1996.

Formative Evaluation of the Strategic Employment Opportunities Program, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, March 1996.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Phase I - Formative Evaluation, Prince Edward Island Choice and Opportunity, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, July 1996.

Process Evaluation of the Prince Edward Island Ready to Learn Project, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, September 1995.

NOVA SCOTIA

A Process Evaluation of Success Nova Scotia 2000, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, November 1996.

Process Evaluation of the Nova Scotia COMPASS Program, Human Resources Development Canada, October 1995.

New Brunswick

Interim Impact and Interim Cost-Benefit/Cost-Effectiveness Evaluation, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, November 1996.

New Brunswick Job Corps: Process Evaluation, Final Report, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, December 1995.

Ontario

Final Report on the Process Evaluation of the Windsor and Sudbury Resource Centres (Ontario jobLink Resource Centres), September 1996.

Manitoba

Taking Charge! Formative Evaluation Report (Phase 1), Volume I, Prairie Research Associates Inc., January 15, 1997.

Saskatchewan

Career Services: Formative Evaluation, Calibre Consultants Inc., August 1997.

Labour Market Information: Formative Evaluation, Calibre Consultants Inc., July 1997.

Alberta

Integrated Training Centres for Youth (ITCY): A Process Evaluation, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, June 1996.

British Columbia

Summary of Formative Evaluation Results of the Assessment, Counselling and Referral Strategic Initiative: Project Report, Kelvin L. McCulloch, KPMG, May 6, 1997.

The Formative Evaluation of the Community Skills Centres, CS/RESORS Consulting, Ltd., March 10, 1997.

The Labour Market Information (LMI) Strategic Initiative, Evaluation Brief.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Paying Dividends: An Evaluation of the Northwest Territories' Investing in People Strategic Initiative - Year One, Final Report, Human Resources Development Canada, November 1995.